

# COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Tuesday 12 November 2019  
Time: 6.30 pm  
Venue: Town Hall, High Street, Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors M Burton, Joy, Khadka, Mortimer (Chairman), Powell (Vice-Chairman), Purle, D Rose, M Rose and Young

*The Chairman will assume that all Members will read the reports before attending the meeting. Officers are asked to assume the same when introducing reports.*

---

## AGENDA

Page No.

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| 1. Apologies for Absence  |          |
| 2. Notification of Substitute Members   |          |
| 3. Urgent Items   |          |
| 4. Notification of Visiting Members   |          |
| 5. Disclosures by Members and Officers  |          |
| 6. Disclosures of Lobbying  |          |
| 7. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information. |          |
| 8. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 15 October 2019   | 1 - 4    |
| 9. Presentation of Petitions (if any)   |          |
| 10. Questions and answer session for members of the public (if any)   |          |
| 11. Committee Work Programme  | 5 - 6    |
| 12. Member Agenda Item Request - GP Surgery Provision   | 7        |
| 13. 2nd Quarter Performance and Budget Monitoring   | 8 - 32   |
| 14. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21-2024/25  | 33 - 77  |
| 15. Housing Allocation Scheme Review  | 78 - 139 |

---

**Issued on Monday 4 November 2019**

**Continued Over/:**

*Alison Broom*

**Alison Broom, Chief Executive**

16. Maidstone Approach Improvements Project	140 - 149
17. Draft Biodiversity Strategy	150 - 250
18. Request for Village Green application	251 - 254

## **PUBLIC SPEAKING AND ALTERNATIVE FORMATS**

If you require this information in an alternative format please contact us, call **01622 602899** or email [committee@maidstone.gov.uk](mailto:committee@maidstone.gov.uk).

In order to speak at this meeting, please contact Democratic Services using the contact details above, by 5 p.m. one clear working day before the meeting (i.e. by 5 p.m. on Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2019). If asking a question, you will need to provide the full text in writing. If making a statement, you will need to tell us which agenda item you wish to speak on. Please note that slots will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.

To find out more about the work of the Committee, please visit [www.maidstone.gov.uk](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk).

Should you wish to refer any decisions contained in these minutes to the **Policy and Resources Committee**, please submit a Decision Referral Form, signed by **three** Councillors, to the **Head of Policy and Communications** by: **22 October 2019**

## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

#### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 15 OCTOBER 2019**

**Present:** Councillors M Burton, Joy, Khadka, Mortimer (Chairman), Powell, Purle, D Rose, M Rose and Young

**Also Present:** Councillors Mrs Gooch, Newton and McKay

#### 13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence. However, it was noted that Councillors D Rose and Purle would be late.

#### 14. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

#### 15. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

#### 16. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

It was noted that the following Councillors were present as Visiting Members:

- Councillor Mrs Gooch indicated that she wished to speak on Item 12 – Presentation on Dementia
- Councillor McKay indicated that he wished to speak on Item 13 – Initial Scoping on Maidstone Approach Improvement Project
- Councillor Newton indicated that he wished to ask a question of the Chairman in regard to the protection of swans and their cygnets at Downswood Pond.

#### 17. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

#### 18. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

19. EXEMPT ITEMS

**RESOLVED:** That all items be taken in public as proposed.

Councillor D Rose arrived during consideration of this item.

20. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 SEPTEMBER 2019

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed.

Councillor Purle arrived during consideration of this item.

21. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

22. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Councillor Newton asked the following question of the Chairman:-

Do Members of this Committee consider that the consistent annual loss of Mute Swans and their Cygnets on the small Mallards Pond at Downswood is acceptable in Environment terms and that it is now time to give the Swans and waterfowl on this pond some protection through a PSPO that may help stop them from being attacked by unleashed dogs around the pond area and furthermore introduce control measures to prevent Anglers fishing during the Swan breeding season. Out of the 7 Cygnets that were hatched only one has survived to date. The male Swan that was witnessed to have been attacked by a dog has spent almost 3 months at the Swan Sanctuary at Shepperton.

The Chairman responded to the question and undertook to request that the relevant Officers arrange a meeting with Councillor Newton to discuss the options as detailed in the response. The full response to the question was made available on the Maidstone Borough Council webcast channel.

23. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Work Programme. The Chairman advised that he had been in discussions with Officers to move, where possible, some agenda items scheduled for November, as the agenda was substantial.

The Chairman confirmed that the following agenda items had been rescheduled to December:-

- Charges for Pre-Application and Professional Advice for Noise, Air Quality and Contaminated Land
- Bedgebury Food Outlet



- Charging for Food Hygiene Advice
- Review of Charges for Contaminated Lane

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Environment and Public Realm advised that Officers had received a significant amount of feedback from the Biodiversity and Climate Change Working Group which would be incorporated into the Biodiversity Strategy report due to be considered by the Committee in November.

Members expressed their concern that items for agendas were not being distributed evenly throughout the year. At times a lot of items were proposed for a specific month, which resulted in a heavy agenda. This meant that Members could not give the items the time and full consideration they deserved.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

24. PRESENTATION ON DEMENTIA - BUILDING A DEMENTIA FRIENDLY MAIDSTONE

Mr Ken Scott from the Building a Dementia Friendly Maidstone organisation gave a presentation to the Committee outlining the following:-

- How the organisation supports people living with dementia
- The initiatives being put forward for dementia cafes and singing groups
- Training programmes to enable carers and families to be supported to enable them to effectively support people living with dementia
- How the programmes and initiatives were to be funded

The Chairman thanked Mr Scott for his interesting presentation and undertook to circulate a copy to all Members of the Committee.

**RESOLVED:** That the Presentation be noted.

25. INITIAL SCOPING ON MAIDSTONE APPROACH IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The Head of Environment and Public Realm presented the initiative to provide improvements to the street scene and landscaping on the A20 Ashford Road (between Willington Street and King Street). Funding of £74,000 had been realised from the Business Rates Retention Pilot.

The Committee noted the key actions which were:-

- A deep cleaning programme to remove detritus from along the Mote Park wall

- A new bus shelter to be installed at the A20 junction with New Cut Road
- New bollards would be installed
- An improved appearance for railings
- Planting of bulbs and shaping wild flower areas to enhance colour and biodiversity and enable habitat development
- Planting of new trees
- New signage which included a heritage board and 'Welcome to Maidstone' sign
- New street name plates
- Creation of heritage features with interpretation boards
- Repainted street lights

In response to questions from Members, the Head of Environment and Public Realm advised that:

- KCC had fully engaged with MBC Officers and had pledged funding for white lining of the road at the conclusion of the project and would be providing permits to allow operatives to work on the roads
- The wooden bus shelters were more attractive and require less maintenance
- The grass verge and bollards at the junction of Willington Street would be reinstated.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee approves the proposed scope of the Maidstone Approach Improvement Project.

26. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

## 2019/20 WORK PROGRAMME

	Committee	Month	Lead	Report Author
Biodiversity Strategy	CHE	12-Nov-19	Jennifer Shepherd	Andrew Williams
Housing Allocation Scheme Review	CHE	12-Nov-19	John Littlemore	Tony Stewart
Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 - 2024/25	CHE	12-Nov-19	Mark Green	Mark Green
Weaving - Village Green Status	CHE	12-Nov-19	William Cornall	Jayne Bolas
Maidstone Approach - Improvement Project	CHE	12-Nov-19	Jennifer Shepherd	John Edwards
Q2 Performance and Budget Monitoring Report	CHE	12-Nov-19	Mark Green	Chris Hartgrove/ Anna Collier
Member Agenda Item Request - GP Surgery Provision	CHE	12-Nov-19	Cllr Purle/Cllr D Rose	Cllr Purle/Cllr D Rose
Review of Accessibility to Services for Residents - Scoping Report and Working Group Set Up	CHE	10-Dec-19	Angela Woodhouse	Orla Sweeney
Age UK - Presentation (TBC)	CHE	10-Dec-19	Cllr Vizzard	Cllr Vizzard
Local Nature Reserves	CHE	10-Dec-19	Rob Jarman	Deanne Cunningham
Review of Charges for Contaminated Land	CHE	10-Dec-19	John Littlemore	Tracey Beattie
Bedgebury Food Outlet	CHE	10-Dec-19	John Littlemore	Tracey Beattie
Charging for Food Hygiene Advice	CHE	10-Dec-19	John Littlemore	Tracey Beattie
Charges for Pre-Application and Professional Advice for Noise, Air Quality and Contaminated Land	CHE	10-Dec-19	John Littlemore	Tracey Beattie

## 2019/20 WORK PROGRAMME

	Committee	Month	Lead	Report Author
Mobile CCTV - Update	CHE	10-Dec-19	John Littlemore	Martyn Jeynes
Fees & Charges 2020/21	CHE	14-Jan-20	Mark Green	Chris Hartgrove
Draft Budget Proposals 2020/21	CHE	14-Jan-20	Mark Green	Chris Hartgrove
Fees & Charges 2019/20	CHE	14-Jan-20	Mark Green	Chris Hartgrove
Q3 Performance and Budget Monitoring Report	CHE	11-Feb-20	Mark Green	Chris Hartgrove/ Anna Collier
Annual Reports of Outside Bodies and Consideration of Outside Bodies for the Next Municipal Year	CHE	11-Feb-20	Angela Woodhouse	Mike Nash
Crime and Disorder Committee	CHE	24-Mar-20	John Littlemore	Martyn Jeynes
Waste and Street Cleansing - Future Provision	CHE	TBC	Jennifer Shepherd	John Edwards
Environmental Services - Commercial developments	CHE	TBC	Jennifer Shepherd	Jennifer Shepherd
Local Care Hubs	CHE	TBC	Alison Broom	
MBC Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)	CHE	TBC	William Cornall	Mark Egerton

## **Communities, Housing and Environment Committee**

**12/11/19**

### **Member Agenda Item Request – GP Surgery Provision**

#### **Introduction:**

##### **From Councillors Purle and D Rose:**

You will be all too aware that Maidstone (and the West Kent Clinical Commissioning Group's area) suffers one of the worst ratios of patients-to-doctors in the country. This appears to apply largely across the board but (a) I am concerned about my patch given the loss 18 months ago of the Allington Park surgery and the prospect of about a million more flats getting built in my Ward or very close to it; and (b) Cllr D Rose is particularly concerned about the poor GP provision in Park Wood, a point aggravated by his residents being on the worse-end of local health inequalities and by monies supposedly having been collected from property developers to address this.

#### **Desired Outcome:**

We would like the committee to request & receive a report at its meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2019 on the subject with particular attention given to two areas as follows:-

Firstly, we understand that conversations have been happening at a high level between the Council's Officers and the Clinical Commissioning Group ("CCG") about GP provision throughout the Borough. We would like an account of these discussions (when they've occurred, frequency, broadly what was said by whom, any commitments or undertakings made or received) with an explanation of particular obstacles the Council may have encountered. Whilst we have a particular interest in our own respective Wards, our interest is Borough-wide and we would particularly like to know of such discussions where they concern any developments in which MBC intends to act as master-developer e.g. Lenham Heath, Maidstone East et cetera.

Secondly, we would like a broad summary & explanation of options that are, even if in theory, open to MBC to accelerate GP surgery provision should it wish to take a more interventionist approach e.g. building & providing surgeries itself.

## Communities, Housing & Environment Committee

12 November 2019

### 2nd Quarter Budget & Performance Monitoring Report 2019/20

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Communities, Housing & Environment Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	Mark Green, Director of Business Improvement
<b>Lead Officer and Report Authors</b>	Chris Hartgrove, Interim Head of Finance Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager (Client) Claire Harvey, Data Intelligence Officer
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

#### Executive Summary

This report sets out the 2019/20 financial and performance position for the services reporting into the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee (CHE) as at 30th September 2019 (Quarter 2). The primary focus is on:

- The 2019/20 Revenue and Capital budgets; and
- The 2019/20 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that relate to the delivery of the Strategic Plan 2019-2045.

The combined reporting of the financial and performance position enables the Committee to consider and comment on the issues raised and actions being taken to address both budget pressures and performance issues in their proper context, reflecting the fact that the financial and performance-related fortunes of the Council are inextricably linked.

#### Budget Monitoring

With regard to revenue, at the Quarter 2 stage, net expenditure of £3.563 million has been incurred against a profiled budget of £4.169 million, representing an under spend of £605,000. The Committee is also expected to remain within its overall net revenue expenditure budget for the year, recording a small under spend of £126,000 against its annual budget of £8.972 million.

With regard to capital, at the Quarter 2 stage, expenditure of £4.319 million has been incurred against a total budget allocation of £17.677 million. At this stage, it is anticipated that there will be slippage of £5.34 million into 2020/21, across a range of schemes.

#### Performance Monitoring

Overall 82% (9 out of 11) targetable quarterly Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), reportable to CHE, achieved their Quarter 2 target.

**Purpose of Report**

The report enables the Committee to consider and comment on the issues raised and actions being taken to address both budget pressures and performance issues as at 30th September 2019.

**This report makes the following Recommendations to the Committee:**

1. That the Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 2 for 2019/20, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted.
2. That the Capital position at the end of Quarter 2 be noted; and
3. That the Performance position as at Quarter 2 for 2019/20, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted.

**Timetable**

<b><i>Meeting</i></b>	<b><i>Date</i></b>
Communities, Housing & Environment Committee	12th November 2019

## 2nd Quarter Budget & Performance Monitoring Report 2019/20

### 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	<p>This report monitors actual activity against the revenue budget and other financial matters set by Council for the financial year. The budget is set in accordance with the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy which is linked to the Strategic Plan and corporate priorities.</p> <p>The Key Performance Indicators and strategic actions are part of the Council's overarching Strategic Plan 2019-45 and play an important role in the achievement of corporate objectives. They also cover a wide range of services and priority areas.</p>	Director of Finance and Business Improvement (Section 151 Officer)
<b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>	This report enables any links between performance and financial matters to be identified and addressed at an early stage, thereby reducing the risk of compromising the delivery of the Strategic Plan 2019-2045, including its cross-cutting objectives.	Director of Finance and Business Improvement (Section 151 Officer)
<b>Risk Management</b>	This is addressed in Section 5 of this report.	Director of Finance and Business Improvement (Section 151 Officer)



Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Financial</b>	<p>Financial implications are the focus of this report through high level budget monitoring. Budget monitoring ensures that services can react quickly enough to potential resource problems. The process ensures that the Council is not faced by corporate financial problems that may prejudice the delivery of strategic priorities.</p> <p>Performance indicators and targets are closely linked to the allocation of resources and determining good value for money. The financial implications of any proposed changes are also identified and taken into account in the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy and associated annual budget setting process. Performance issues are highlighted as part of the budget monitoring reporting process.</p>	Senior Finance Manager (Client)
<b>Staffing</b>	<p>The budget for staffing represents a significant proportion of the direct spend of the Council and is carefully monitored. Any issues in relation to employee costs will be raised in this and future monitoring reports.</p> <p>Having a clear set of performance targets enables staff outcomes/objectives to be set and effective action plans to be put in place.</p>	Director of Finance and Business Improvement (Section 151 Officer)
<b>Legal</b>	<p>The Council has a statutory obligation to maintain a balanced budget and the monitoring process enables the Committee to remain aware of issues and the process to be taken to maintain a balanced budget.</p> <p>There is no statutory duty to report regularly on the Council's performance. However, under Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 (as amended) a best value authority has a statutory duty to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. One of the purposes of the Key Performance Indicators is to facilitate the improvement of the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of Council services. Regular reports on Council performance help to demonstrate best value and compliance with the statutory duty.</p>	Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Privacy and Data Protection</b>	The performance data is held and processed in accordance with the data protection principles contained in the Data Protection Act 2018 and in line with the Data Quality Policy, which sets out the requirement for ensuring data quality. There is a program for undertaking data quality audits of performance indicators.	Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS
<b>Equalities</b>	There is no impact on Equalities as a result of the recommendations in this report. An EqIA would be carried out as part of a policy or service change should one be identified.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
<b>Public Health</b>	The performance recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals.	Public Health Officer
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	There are no specific issues arising.	Director of Finance and Business Improvement (Section 151 Officer)
<b>Procurement</b>	Performance Indicators and Strategic Milestones monitor any procurement needed to achieve the outcomes of the Strategic Plan.	Director of Finance and Business Improvement (Section 151 Officer)

## 2. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2019/20 to 2023/24 - including the budget for 2019/20 - was approved by full Council on 27th February 2019. This report updates the Committee on how its services have performed in the first six months of the financial year with regard to revenue and capital expenditure against approved budgets.
- 2.2 This report also includes an update to the Committee on progress against its Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
- 2.3 Attached at **Appendix 1**, is a report setting out the revenue and capital spending position at the Quarter 2 stage. Attached at **Appendix 2**, is a report setting out the position for the KPIs for the corresponding period.

### **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 There are no matters for decision in this report. The Committee is asked to note the contents but may choose to take further action depending on the matters reported here.
- 

### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 In considering the current position on the Revenue budget, the Capital Programme and KPIs at the end of September 2019, the Committee can choose to note this information or could choose to take further action.
- 4.2 The Committee is requested to note the content of the report and agree on any necessary action to be taken in relation to the budget position and/or the KPIs position.
- 

### **5. RISK**

- 5.1 This report is presented for information only and has no direct risk management implications.
- 5.2 The Council has produced a balanced budget for both revenue and capital income and expenditure for 2019/20. The budget is set against a backdrop of limited resources and a difficult economic climate. Regular and comprehensive monitoring of the type included in this report ensures early warning of significant issues that may place the Council at financial risk. This gives the Committee the best opportunity to take actions to mitigate such risks.
- 

### **6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

- 6.1 The KPIs update ("Performance Monitoring") is reported to service committees quarterly: Communities, Housing & Environment Committee; Economic Regeneration & Leisure Committee; and the Strategic Planning & Infrastructure Committee. Each committee will receive a report on the relevant priority action areas. The report is also presented to the Policy & Resources Committee, reporting on the priority areas of "A Thriving Place", "Safe, Clean and Green", "Homes and Communities" and "Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure".
- 

### **7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 7.1 The Quarter 2 Budget & Performance Monitoring reports are being considered by the relevant Service Committees during October and November 2019, including a full report to the Policy & Resources Committee on 20th November 2019.

- 7.2 Details of the discussions which take place at Service Committees regarding financial and performance management will be reported to Policy and Resources Committee where appropriate.
- 7.3 The Council could choose not to monitor its budget and/or the Strategic Plan and/or make alternative performance management arrangements, such as the frequency of reporting. This is not recommended as it could lead to action not being taken against financial and/or other performance during the year, and the Council failing to deliver its priorities.
- 

## **8. REPORT APPENDICES**

- **Appendix 1:** Second Quarter Budget Monitoring 2019/20
  - **Appendix 2:** Second Quarter Performance Monitoring 2019/20
- 

## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.

# Second Quarter Budget Monitoring 2019/20

Communities, Housing & Environment Committee

12th November 2019

Lead Officer: Mark Green

15 Report Authors: Chris Hartgrove/Paul Holland

# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>Page 2</b>
--------------------------	---------------

## **Part A: Second Quarter Revenue Budget 2019/20**

<b>A1) Revenue Budget: Council</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>A2) Revenue Budget: Communities, Housing &amp; Environment</b>	<b>Page 5</b>
<b>A3) Revenue Budget: Significant Variances (&gt;£30,000)</b>	<b>Page 7</b>

## **Part B: Second Quarter Capital Budget 2019/20**

<b>B1) Capital Budget: Council</b>	<b>Page 10</b>
<b>B2) Capital Budget: Communities, Housing &amp; Environment</b>	<b>Page 10</b>

# Executive Summary

This report provides Members with an overview of progress against the 2019/20 revenue and capital budgets as at 30th September 2019 (i.e. the Quarter 2 cumulative position) for the services falling within the remit of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee (CHE). The analysis also includes both revenue and capital year-end projections (to 31st March 2020) for CHE services, as well as some important context, with consideration given to the Council's overall position.

The headlines for Quarter 2 are as follows:

## **Part A: Second Quarter Revenue Budget 2019/20**

- Overall net expenditure for the services reporting to CHE is £3.563 million, compared to the profiled budget of £4.169 million, representing an under spend of £605,000. CHE is also expected to remain within its overall net revenue expenditure budget for the year, recording a small under spend of £126,000 against its annual budget of £8.972 million.
- Overall net expenditure for the Council is £6.813 million, compared to the profiled budget of £7.553 million, representing an under spend of £0.74 million. The Council is also expected to remain within its overall net revenue expenditure budget of £21.138 million for the year.

## **Part B: Second Quarter Capital Budget 2019/20**

- Capital expenditure for the services reporting to CHE of £4.319 million has been incurred against the annual budget of £17.677 million. At this stage, it is anticipated that there will be slippage of £5.34 million.
- Capital expenditure for the Council overall of £5.443 million has been incurred against the annual budget of £51.754 million.

## Part A

# Second Quarter Revenue Budget 2019/20

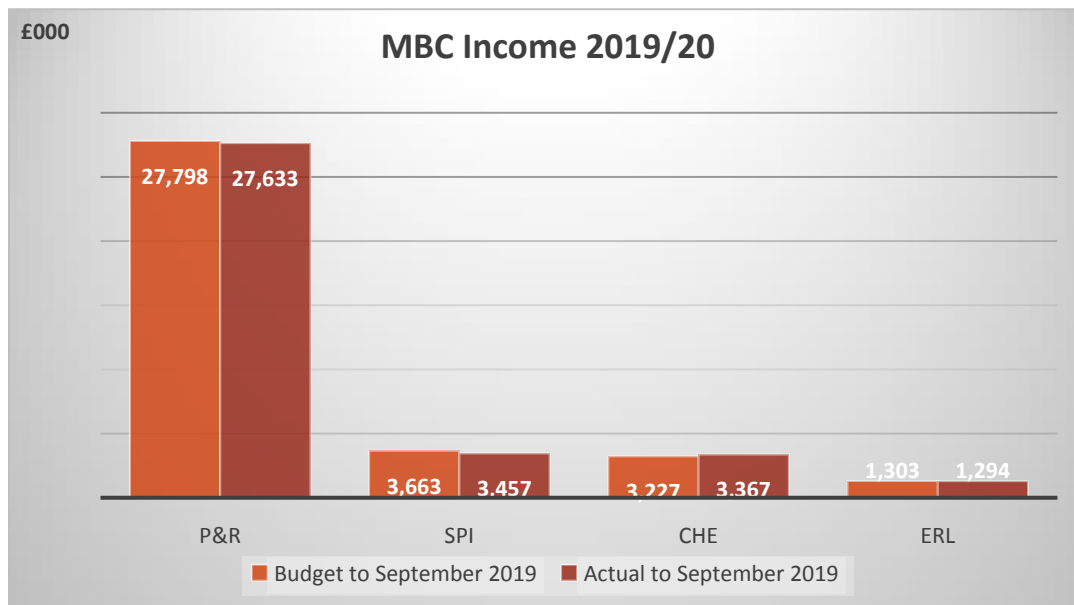


## A1) Revenue Budget: Council

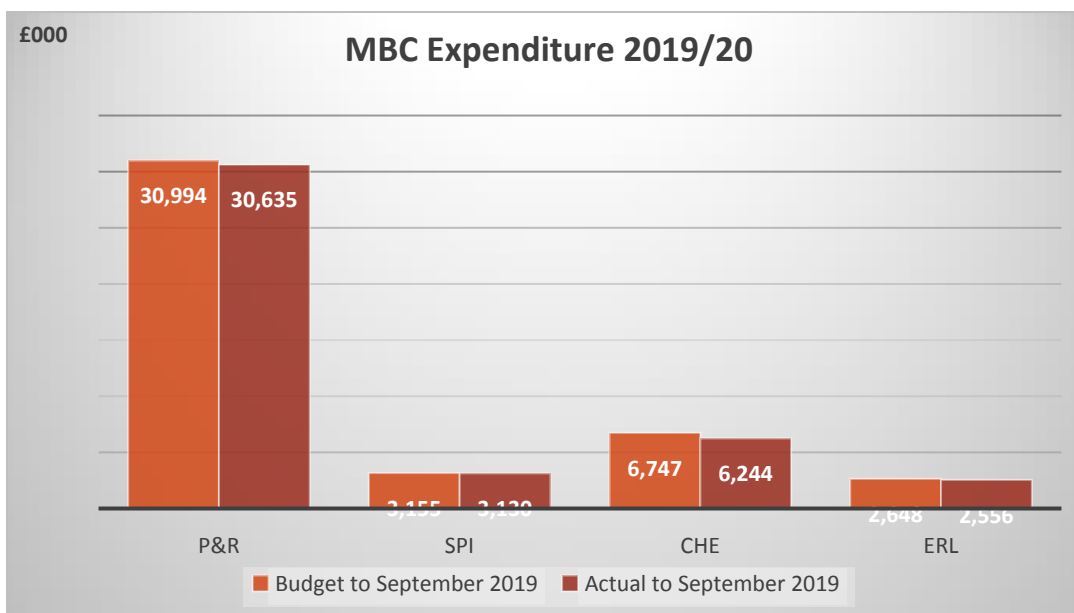
A1.1 At the Quarter 2 stage, overall net expenditure for the Council is £6.813 million, compared to the profiled budget of £7.553 million, representing an under spend of £0.74 million. Based on forward projections, the Council is expected to remain within its overall net revenue expenditure budget of £21.138 million for the year.

A1.2 The two charts below show the income and expenditure position for each service committee.

**Chart 1: MBC Revenue Budget: INCOME BY SERVICE COMMITTEE**



**Chart 2: MBC Revenue Budget: EXPENDITURE BY SERVICE COMMITTEE**



## **A2) Revenue Budget: Communities, Housing & Environment (CHE)**

A2.1 Table 1 below provides a detailed summary on the budgeted net expenditure position for CHE services at the end of Quarter 2. The financial figures are presented on an 'accruals' basis (e.g. expenditure for goods and services received, but not yet paid for, is included).

**Table 1: CHE Revenue Budget: NET EXPENDITURE**

(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)
Cost Centre	Budget for Year £000	Budget to 30 September 2019 £000	Actual £000	Variance £000	Forecast 31 March 2020 £000	Forecast Variance 31 March 2020 £000
Parks & Open Spaces	962	470	505	-35	1,022	-61
Playground Maintenance & Improvements	144	70	59	12	129	15
Parks Pavilions	25	12	19	-7	25	0
Mote Park	253	129	134	-4	253	0
Allotments	12	7	5	2	12	0
Leisure Services Other Activities	10	9	10	-1	10	0
Cemetery	48	48	37	10	38	10
National Assistance Act	-0	-0	-1	1	-0	0
Crematorium	-808	-263	-203	-60	-829	21
Community Safety	58	14	6	8	58	0
PCC Grant - Building Safer Communities	0	-17	-18	0	0	0
C C T V	208	104	126	-22	208	0
Drainage	32	16	0	16	32	0
Licences	-6	-0	-6	5	-6	0
Licensing Statutory	-66	-33	-47	14	-66	0
Licensing Non Chargeable	8	4	4	-0	8	0
Dog Control	29	12	19	-7	29	0
Health Improvement Programme	9	9	0	9	9	0
Pollution Control - General	45	40	31	10	45	0
Contaminated Land	0	0	-0	0	0	0
Waste Crime	2	4	9	-6	2	0
Food Hygiene	2	1	0	1	2	0
Sampling	3	1	0	1	3	0
Occupational Health & Safety	25	11	-4	15	25	0
Infectious Disease Control	1	1	1	0	1	0
Noise Control	1	0	0	0	1	0
Pest Control	-12	-6	-6	-0	-12	0
Public Conveniences	185	88	86	2	185	0
Licensing - Hackney & Private Hire	-64	-34	-42	8	-64	0
Street Cleansing	1,131	564	562	2	1,131	0
Household Waste Collection	1,213	596	578	19	1,213	0
Commercial Waste Services	-64	-34	-23	-11	-64	0
Recycling Collection	713	531	491	40	633	80
Community Environmental Engagement	101	51	19	31	101	0

(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)
Cost Centre	Budget for Year £000	Budget to 30 September 2019 £000	Actual £000	Variance £000	Forecast 31 March 2020 £000	Forecast Variance 31 March 2020 £000
Social Inclusion	4	4	4	-0	4	0
Public Health - Obesity	0	-7	-0	-6	0	0
Public Health - Misc Services	2	0	-4	4	2	0
Grants	184	184	185	-1	184	0
Delegated Grants	2	2	1	1	2	0
Parish Services	127	64	63	0	127	0
Member's Community Grant	60	24	4	20	60	0
Strategic Housing Role	14	-7	-21	14	14	0
Housing Register & Allocations	10	9	10	-0	10	0
Private Sector Renewal	-47	-49	-50	1	-47	0
HMO Licensing	-20	-10	-13	3	-20	0
Homeless Temporary Accommodation	532	266	227	39	532	0
Homelessness Prevention	329	-92	-308	216	329	0
Aylesbury House	22	26	24	2	22	0
Magnolia House	-20	-10	1	-11	-20	0
St Martins House	0	1	-1	2	0	0
Marsham Street	38	38	19	19	38	0
Sundry Temporary Accommodation (TA) Properties	-34	-15	-11	-4	-34	0
Pelican Court (Leased TA Property)	0	-13	-16	2	0	0
2 Bed Property - Temporary Accommodation	-57	-28	-28	-0	-57	0
3 Bed Property - Temporary Accommodation	-48	-23	-20	-3	-48	0
4 bed Property - Temporary Accommodation	-9	-4	-1	-3	-9	0
1 Bed Property- Temporary Accommodation	-2	0	0	-0	-2	0
Housing First Project	80	40	1	39	80	0
Melville Road Supported Accommodation	-9	-6	-10	4	-9	0
Marden Caravan Site (Stilebridge Lane)	19	9	-3	11	19	0
Ulcombe Caravan Site (Water Lane)	7	1	-1	2	7	0
Head of Environment and Public Realm	98	49	46	3	98	0
Bereavement Services Section	205	103	95	7	199	6
Community Partnerships & Resilience Section	505	274	247	27	488	17
Licensing Section	110	55	50	5	110	0
Environmental Protection Section	261	130	130	-0	261	0
Food and Safety Section	255	128	128	-0	255	0
Depot Services Section	755	378	342	36	725	30
Head of Housing & Community Services	107	54	53	1	107	0
Homechoice Section	209	83	66	17	209	0
Housing & Inclusion Section	523	146	119	27	502	20
Housing & Health Section	254	30	25	5	254	0
Housing Management	247	73	59	14	247	0
Homelessness Outreach	2	-180	-184	4	2	0
Salary Slippage 3CHE	-99	-49	0	-49	0	-99
Fleet Workshop & Management	236	127	87	40	236	0
MBS Support Crew	-61	-33	-41	8	-61	0
Grounds Maintenance - Commercial	-17	-7	-63	56	-104	86
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,972</b>	<b>4,169</b>	<b>3,563</b>	<b>605</b>	<b>8,846</b>	<b>126</b>

A2.2 The table shows that, at the Quarter 2 stage, overall net expenditure for the services reporting to CHE is £3.563 million, compared to the profiled budget of £4.169 million, representing an under spend of £605,000. Based on forward projections, CHE is expected to remain within its overall net revenue expenditure budget for the year, recording an under spend of £126,000 against a budget of £8.972 million.

### A3) CHE Revenue Budget: Significant Variances (>£30,000)

A3.1 Within the headline figures, there are a number of both adverse and favourable net expenditure variances for individual cost centres. It is important that the implications of variances are considered at an early stage, so that contingency plans can be put in place and, if necessary, be used to inform future financial planning.

A3.2 Table 2 below highlights and provides further detail on the most significant variances i.e. those meeting or exceeding £30,000, either at the end of Quarter 2, or expected to do so by year-end.

**Table 2: CHE Variances >£30,000 (@ Quarter 2)**

	Positive Variance Q2	Adverse Variance Q2	Year End Forecast Variance
<b>Communities, Housing &amp; Environment Committee</b>	<b>£000s</b>		
<b>Parks and Open Spaces</b> – Residual undelivered savings of £63,000 in respect of a previous re-structure is the most significant factor in the over spend.		-35	-61
<b>Crematorium</b> – Higher than budgeted maintenance costs partly driven by un-accrued (maintenance) expenditure from 2018/19 (of £18,000) is the reason for the budget pressure at the Quarter 2 stage, although the budget is expected to be met by year end.		-60	+21
<b>Recycling Collection</b> – Savings from the purchase of wheeled bins (£31k April to September 2019) has been the biggest factor in lower than budgeted expenditure at the Quarter 2 stage. Current expenditure patterns are assumed to continue for the remainder of the financial year.	+40		+80
<b>Community Environmental Engagement</b> – The variance relates to the “Go Green, Go Wild” project, funded by the Business Rates Pilot initiative. The updated spending profile for the project envisages £31,000 being rolled forward into 2020/21 to fund a Community Engagement Officer post.	+31		0

Table 2 cont.	Positive Variance Q2	Adverse Variance Q2	Year End Forecast Variance
Communities, Housing & Environment Committee	£000s		
<b>Homeless Temporary Accommodation</b> – A positive variance has arisen at the Quarter 2 stage as savings are being realised due to the use of MBC properties for temporary accommodation (compared to the former use of third party providers). The savings realised will offset overspending elsewhere on MBC temporary accommodation properties.	+39		0
<b>Homelessness Prevention</b> – The variance at this stage is largely due to unspent Government Housing Grant. It is currently assumed that this will be spent by the year end, although any balance would be carried forward into 2020/21.	+216		0
<b>Housing First Project</b> – The variance relates to the “Housing First and Rough Sleepers” project, funded by the Business Rates Pilot initiative, which has been successful in housing 6 homeless people. The residual budget is now available to meet potential landlord liabilities upon the expiry of the tenancies and is being re-profiled to reflect this pattern.	+39		0
<b>Depot Services Section</b> – Lower employee costs are being experienced following the recent implementation of a staff re-structure.	+36		+30
<b>Salary Slippage</b> – This is a credit budget, which allows for service underspends on salaries, due to temporary vacancies arising from staff turnover. There is currently an adverse variance, which is expected to be offset by service underspends by the year end.		-49	-99
<b>Fleet Workshop &amp; Management</b> – A reduced need for vehicle hire (saving £22,000, following the recent purchase 3 new sweepers) is the single largest item in reduced expenditure at the Quarter 2 stage, although the cost centre is expected to come in on budget, with no significant surplus, at year end.	+40		0
<b>Grounds Maintenance Commercial</b> – Additional income has been generated in this area from Section 106 funded works, and other external works.	+56		+86

## Part B

# Second Quarter Capital Budget 2019/20

## B1) Capital Budget: Council

B1.1 The overall five-year Capital Programme for 2019/20 to 2023/24 was approved by the Council on 27th February 2019. Most capital funding will now come from prudential borrowing as other sources of funding are not sufficient to cover the costs of the Programme, although funding does continue to be available from the New Homes Bonus (NHB). At the time of preparing this report there has been no need to borrow, but it is anticipated that borrowing will be needed during the latter half of 2019/20.

B1.2 The 2019/20 element of the Capital Programme has a total budget of £51.754 million. At the Quarter 2 stage, capital expenditure of £4.608 million has been incurred.

## B2) Capital Budget: Communities, Housing & Environment Committee (CHE)

B2.1 Progress towards the delivery of the 2019/20 CHE element of the Capital Programme at the Quarter 2 stage is presented in Table 3 below. The budget for 2019/20 includes resources brought forward from 2018/19.

B2.2 At the Quarter 2 stage, expenditure of £4.301 million has been incurred against a budget of £17.677 million. It is anticipated that there will be slippage of £5.34 million at year end (the Committee will be asked to approve/note the carry forward of resources into the next financial year).

**Table 3: CHE Capital Programme 2019/20 (@ Quarter 2)**

Capital Programme Heading	Estimate 2019/20 £000	Actual to September 2019 £000	Budget Remaining £000	Q3 Profile £000	Q4 Profile £000	Projected Total Expenditure £000	Projected Slippage to 2020/21 £000
<b>Communities, Housing &amp; Environment</b>							
Brunswick Street - Net Cost of Scheme	3,441	1,700	1,740	870	870	3,440	0
Union Street - Net Cost of Scheme	2,085	337	1,748	874	874	2,085	-0
Indicative Schemes	4,124	100	4,024	1,408	808	2,316	1,808
Housing - Disabled Facilities Grants Funding	1,570	226	1,343	175	250	651	918
Temporary Accommodation	3,236	1,831	1,405	1,000	64	2,895	341
Housing Incentives	1,040	6	1,034	50	50	0	1,040
Gypsy Site Improvement Works	42	25	17	17		42	-0
CCTV Upgrade and Relocation	150	13	137	37	100	150	-0
Commercial Waste	180		180	180		180	
Street Scene Investment	147		147	25	25	50	97
Flood Action Plan	1,000		1,000	100	100	200	800
Continued Improvements to Play Areas	422	49	373	20	20	89	333
Commercial Projects - Crematorium Projects	40	12	28	28		40	-0
Commercial Projects - Cemetery Chapel Repairs	100		100	25	75	100	
Other Parks Improvements	100	1	99	49	50	100	-0
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,677</b>	<b>4,301</b>	<b>13,376</b>	<b>4,858</b>	<b>3,286</b>	<b>12,340</b>	<b>5,337</b>










B2.3 The most (financially) significant items in the table above are as follows:

- Indicative Schemes – The budget included provision for the purchase of a property initially valued at £1.2 million. However that purchase is no longer proceeding. In addition, updated cash flow projections for the Springfield Mill project anticipate slippage of £708,000 into 2020/21 (from a budget provision of £2.924 million). £100,000 is assumed to be spent in 2019/20 on feasibility works for replacement schemes
- Housing – Disabled Facilities Grants – Expenditure on housing adaptations often does not match the Council's financial year. The 2019/20 budget of £1.57 million is fully and includes allocations for a wider range of initiatives, including the "Helping You Home" scheme, operated in conjunction with Maidstone and Pembury hospitals
- Housing Incentives – Historically this budget has been under-utilised. The proposal with regard to the current surplus is to utilize it for major refurbishment works at the Council-owned gypsy sites in order to modernize facilities and bring them up to a good standard; initial survey works have started. The future use of the Housing Incentives budget is to be considered within the updated Housing Strategy (scheduled for 2020); and
- Flood Action Plan - The project specifications are currently being developed with the Environment Agency and the timing of the works has yet to be confirmed. At this stage it has been assumed that the majority (80%) of the budget will be carried forward into 2020/21.

# Second Quarter Performance Monitoring 2019/20

## Key to performance ratings

RAG Rating		Performance	Direction	
	Target not achieved			Performance has improved
	Target slightly missed (within 10%)			Performance has been sustained
	Target met			Performance has declined
	Data Only		N/A	No previous data to compare























## Summary

RAG Rating	Green	Amber	Red	N/A <sup>1</sup>	Total
KPIs	9	2	0	4	15
Direction	Up	No Change	Down	N/A	Total
Last Year	7	1	5	2	15
Last Quarter	11	1	2	1	15

- 82% (9) of targetable quarterly Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), reportable to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee achieved their Quarter 2 target.
- 54% (7) KPIs are showing improved performance compared to Quarter 2 in 2018/19, including two information only KPIs which show volumes have increased; and
- 79% (11) KPIs are showing improvement performance compared to Quarter 1 this year. One targeted KPI cannot be given a direction of travel in relation to Quarter 1 this year as it is reported cumulatively.

<sup>1</sup> Pls rated N/A are not included in the summery calculations

























## Safe, clean and green

Performance Indicator	Q2 2019/20				
	Value	Target	Status	Long Trend	Short Trend
Percentage of unauthorised encampments on Council owned land removed within 5 working days	100%	90%			
The percentage of land and highways with acceptable levels of litter	98.34%	98.00%			
The percentage of land and highways with acceptable levels of detritus	98.34%	95.00%			
Percentage of fly tips resulting in enforcement action	92.3%	80.0%			
Percentage of fly-tips cleared or assessed within 2 working days	97.72%	94.00%			
Average weight of fly-tipped collected materials (kg)	172.68kg				
Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting (NI 192)	52.10%	52.00%			

The KPIs relating to the “Safe, Clean and Green” priority are all performing well with all of the targeted KPIs achieving their Quarter 2 targets. Three KPIs show an improvement compared to Quarter 2 last year (in addition the PI Average weight of fly-tipped collected materials (kg) is also showing). Four KPIs show improvement in performance compared to Quarter 1 this year.

During Quarter 2 the Clean Street consultation concluded with a total of 1,785 responses. This showed that 44% of respondents think that their local area is “fairly clean” or “very clean”. The survey also asked respondents about fly-tipping hotspots and how they think different cleaning issues have changed over the last three years. This information will be used as part of the Street Cleaning review which will be reported to this committee in 2020.

## Homes & Communities

Performance Indicator	Q2 2019/20				
	Value	Target	Status	Long Trend	Short Trend
Percentage spend and allocation of Disabled Facilities Grant Budget (YTD)	64.7%	40.0%			N/A
Number of houses of multiple occupation brought to compliance by private rented sector licensing	16				
Number of households living in temporary accommodation last night of the month (NI 156 & SDL 009-00)	95				
Number of households living in nightly paid temporary accommodation last night of the month	45				
Number of households housed through housing register	139	150			
Percentage of successful relief duty outcomes	54.33%	60.00%		N/A	
Percentage of successful prevention duty outcomes	60.00%	60.00%		N/A	
Number of households prevented or relieved from becoming homeless	129	83			

There are five targeted KPIs that relate to the priority "Homes & Communities"; three of these (60%) have been rated green as they have achieved their quarterly targets, two have been rated amber and have missed the target by less than 10%.

In total 139 households were housed through the Housing Register during Quarter 2, which is marginally less than the target of 150. For the last three years the aim has been to house a minimum of 600 households from the Register each year, however this is dependent on housing providers having vacant properties available. The team have reported that this, coupled with a limited number of new units being delivered, has resulted in the target being marginally missed. If this trend continues it is likely that the annual target will not be achieved.

The percentage of successful duty outcomes has marginally missing the quarterly target. The Quarter 2 outturn is an improvement from Quarter 1 when just under half of relief cases had successful outcomes (47.18%). While there is no overlap between Homelessness Prevention cases and Homelessness Relief cases, there is overlap between Relief cases and where a main housing duty is owed. Therefore, it is expected that the ability to relieve Homelessness in such cases will be contingent on properties being available.

## COMMUNITIES HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

**12 November 2019**

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

**No**

### Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21-2024/25

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Council
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	Director of Finance and Business Improvement
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Director of Finance and Business Improvement
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

#### Executive Summary

This report sets out a draft new Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the Council. The new strategy updates the existing strategy to cover the five-year period 2020/21 to 2024/25 and to reflect changes in the local authority financial landscape and corporate priorities.

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

1. Consider and comment on the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 – 2024/25.

#### Timetable

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Economic Regeneration & Leisure Committee	29 October 2019
Strategic Planning & Infrastructure Committee	5 November 2019
Communities Housing & Environment Committee	12 November 2019
Policy and Resources Committee	20 November 2019
Council	11 December 2019
All Service Committees	January 2020
Policy and Resources Committee	12 February 2020
Council	26 February 2020

# Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21-2024/25

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	The Medium Term Financial Strategy and the budget are a re-statement in financial terms of the priorities set out in the strategic plan. They reflect the Council's decisions on the allocation of resources to all objectives of the strategic plan.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>	The MTFS supports the cross-cutting objectives in the same way that it supports the Council's other strategic priorities.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Risk Management</b>	This has been addressed in section 5 of the report.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Financial</b>	The budget strategy and the MTFS impact upon all activities of the Council. The future availability of resources to address specific issues is planned through this process. It is important that the committee gives consideration to the strategic financial consequences of the recommendations in this report.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Staffing</b>	The process of developing the budget strategy will identify the level of resources available for staffing over the medium term.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Legal</b>	The Council has a statutory obligation to set a balanced budget and development of the MTFS and the strategic revenue projection in the ways set out in this report supports achievement of a balanced budget.	Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS
<b>Privacy and Data Protection</b>	Privacy and Data Protection is considered as part of the development of new budget proposals. There are no specific implications arising from this report.	Policy and Information Team
<b>Equalities</b>	The MFTS report scopes the possible impact of the Council's future financial position on service delivery. When a policy, service or function is developed, changed or reviewed, an evidence based equalities impact assessment will be undertaken. Should an impact be identified appropriate mitigations	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer



	with be identified.	
<b>Public Health</b>	The resources to achieve the Council's objectives are allocated through the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.	Public Health Officer
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	The resources to achieve the Council's objectives are allocated through the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Procurement</b>	The resources to achieve the Council's objectives are allocated through the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team

## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets out in financial terms how the Council will deliver its Strategic Plan over the next five years. The Council agreed a new Strategic Plan in December 2018 which describes and prioritises our corporate objectives. The MTFS sets out how these objectives will be delivered, given the resources available.
- 2.2 The draft MTFS is attached as Appendix A. It builds on the existing MTFS, which was developed in parallel with the new Strategic Plan and was agreed by Council in December 2018. The main developments since December 2018 have been further central government announcements about local authority funding and refinement of our own corporate priorities.
- 2.3 A key outcome of the process of updating the MTFS is to set a balanced budget and agree a level of council tax for 2020/21 at the Council meeting on 26 February 2020. This report is a key step towards achieving that objective.

### **Local authority funding**

- 2.4 It was originally anticipated that a new local government funding regime would be introduced in 2020/21. However, this has now been delayed until 2021/22 and the government plans to implement a 'roll-forward' settlement for 2020/21, with stability for the majority of funding sources for local government.
- 2.5 The implications of this for the key financial variables are as follows.

Council Tax - The government plans to set a limit of 2% to increases, above which a referendum would be required (as compared to 3% in 2019/20).

Business Rates - The Business Rates baseline, which dictates the amount of business rates that local authorities may retain locally, will be increased in line with inflation.

Negative Revenue Support Grant - The government is currently minded not to levy negative revenue support grant, but this is subject to consultation.

This would mean a broadly neutral revenue position in real terms for Maidstone Borough Council, so long as Council Tax is increased by 2% and no negative RSG is levied.

2.6 The new regime to be implemented in 2021/22 will include much more significant changes, which are likely to include:

- Implementation of a 'Fair Funding Review'
- 75% business rates retention by local authorities (versus 50% now)
- Resetting business rates baselines.

It should be noted that 75% business rates retention will not mean an increase in resources for individual local authorities. The government originally intended the increased business rates income to be accompanied by an increase in responsibilities, eg for public health; it remains to be seen what new responsibilities will actually be devolved to local authorities.

2.7 The implications of this for the MTFS are:

- Assuming no major changes in corporate priorities, a 'standstill' budget could be set for 2020/21, with updating simply to allow for inflation.
- For future years, there remains a considerable degree of uncertainty and it is therefore appropriate to plan for a number of different potential scenarios – favourable, neutral and adverse.

### **Corporate Objectives and Key Priorities**

2.8 The Council's Strategic Plan sets out four key priorities, as follows:

- Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure
- Homes and Communities
- A Thriving Place
- Safe, Clean and Green.

Over the past year, the priority of 'Embracing growth and enabling infrastructure' has been made more explicit through our developing plans for an Innovation Centre, for Maidstone East and a new Garden Community. Investment plans have been approved by Policy and Resources Committee which seek to promote Maidstone as a 'Thriving Place', as well as generating a positive financial return for the Council. The priority of a 'Safe, Clean and Green' place has been emphasised by Council's decision to declare its recognition of global climate and

biodiversity emergencies, and to consider adopting a target date of 2030 for the whole of the Borough of Maidstone to be carbon neutral.

- 2.9 These refinements of the Strategic Plan are likely to involve a limited amount of additional revenue expenditure in the short term, and additional capital investment in the medium to long term. This will be factored into the strategic revenue projections, whilst recognising that the overall requirement to deliver a standstill revenue budget means that budget growth in one area will need to be offset by savings or additional income in another.

### Revenue Projections

- 2.10 Financial projections for the next five years have been updated, based on what is now known about the local government financial settlement for 2020/21 and other emerging information. These projections assume that budget savings already agreed by members, as set in Appendix B, are delivered. Financial projections indicate a budget position as follows under the different scenarios. Full details are set out in Appendix C.

	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m

<b>Scenario 1 – Favourable</b>					
<b>Budget gap / (surplus)</b>	<b>-0.2</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>1.2</b>

<b>Scenario 2 – Neutral</b>					
<b>Budget gap / (surplus)</b>	<b>-0.1</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.2</b>

<b>Scenario 3 – Adverse</b>					
<b>Budget gap</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>5.5</b>

- 2.11 These figures assume inflation of 2% per annum, in line with the Bank of England's long term forecast, and that Council Tax is increased correspondingly, ie by 2% per annum, such that its level remains constant in real terms.
- 2.12 On the basis of these assumptions, a balanced position can be achieved in 2020/21 under the neutral and favourable scenarios. There will be an increasing budget gap in future years, although the deficit flattens out in year 5 as income from Council capital investments grows. The budget gap in the neutral scenario is considered to be manageable, in that by 2024/25 it still represents less than 5% of the Council's projected operating income.
- 2.13 The projected gap will be kept under review and steps taken to bring forward proposals for addressing it, whether by generating additional income or making savings, in good time such that there is no risk of the Council setting an unbalanced budget in future years.
- 2.14 The following table compares the position in the neutral scenario for a 2% Council Tax increase with that for a Council Tax freeze, as requested by

Members at the meeting of Policy and Resources Committee on 23 July 2019.

	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m

<b>Neutral Scenario – Council Tax increase 2% per annum</b>					
<b>Budget gap</b>	<b>-0.1</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.2</b>

<b>Neutral Scenario – Council Tax freeze</b>					
<b>Budget gap</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>4.0</b>

Assuming all other factors remained unchanged, freezing Council Tax would lead to a budget gap of £200,000 in 2020/21. Over the longer term, it can be seen that not increasing Council Tax in line with inflation increases the budget gap to a level which risks being unmanageable.

### **Capital Programme**

- 2.15 The capital programme plays a vital part in delivering the Council's strategic plan, since it is only through long term investment that our ambitions for the borough can be realised. The capital programme is a rolling five year programme. The existing capital programme totals £109 million over five years. Major schemes include the following:

- Brunswick Street redevelopment
- Union Street redevelopment
- Further mixed housing and regeneration schemes
- Council affordable housing programme
- Housing for temporary accommodation
- Flood Action Plan
- Improvements at Mote Park
- Mote Park dam works
- Town centre regeneration
- Commercial property investments.

- 2.16 Schemes may be included in the capital programme if they fall within one of the four following categories:

- Required for statutory reasons, eg to ensure that Council property meets health and safety requirements;
- Self-funding schemes focused on strategic plan priority outcomes;
- Other schemes focused on strategic plan priority outcomes; and
- Other priority schemes which will attract significant external funding.

- 2.17 To the extent that schemes are self-funding, in other words they cover the cost of finance and a provision for repayment of borrowing, there is no net impact on the revenue budget. This gives scope for the capital programme to be expanded, subject to the Council's agreed prudential indicators. These indicators are important in ensuring that the burden of borrowing is reasonable given the Council's overall revenue budget.

## **Reserves**

- 2.18 The Council maintains reserves as a safety net to allow for unforeseen circumstances. There is no statutory definition of the minimum level of reserves: the amount required is a matter of judgement. However, the Council has agreed to set £2 million as the minimum General Fund balance.
- 2.19 In practice, reserves are higher than this. In total, General Fund balances at 31 March 2019 amounted to £14.4 million. The budget for the current financial year allows for a further £1.6 million, money that was originally set aside to pay negative Revenue Support Grant, to be added to reserves as a contingency for future funding pressures. It is proposed that this contingency be rolled forward to 2021/22, given that the government's standstill funding settlement does not require us to draw on the contingency in 2020/21. This would maintain reserves at a healthy, but not excessive level.

## **Conclusion**

- 2.20 In the short term, the government's spending round announcements allow the Council to assume a real terms 'stand still' spending position for 2020/21, provided Council Tax is increased up to the referendum limit of 2%.
- 2.21 In the longer term, a budget gap is likely to emerge. Budget proposals will be brought forward to address the projected gap as necessary, whether by generating additional income or making savings, such that there is no risk of the Council setting an unbalanced budget in future years.

---

## **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to consider and comment on the draft MTFS attached at Appendix A. Any changes and comments will be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 20 November.
- 3.2 The Committee could choose not to comment on Appendix A.

---

## **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 The The Committee is asked to consider and comment on the draft MTFS attached at Appendix A. This will ensure that its views are taken into account as part of developing the MTFS.

## **5. RISK**

- 5.1 The preceding paragraphs have indicated at several points the risks and uncertainty surrounding the Council's financial position. In order to address these in a structured way and to ensure that appropriate mitigations are developed, the Council has developed a budget risk register. This seeks to capture all known budget risks and to present them in a readily comprehensible way. The budget risk register is updated regularly and is reviewed by the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee at each meeting.
- 

## **6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

- 6.1 Policy and Resources Committee reviewed the background to setting a new Medium Term Financial Strategy at their meeting on 23 July. They noted the planning assumptions and requested that officers consider the implications of both (a) a Council Tax freeze and (b) maintaining the level of Council Tax in real terms.
- 6.2 A survey is currently under way, consulting residents on what they wish to see in the budget. The results will be reported when detailed budget proposals are presented to the Committee in January 2020, so Members will be able to take into account residents' views at that stage.
- 

## **7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 7.1 An outline timetable for developing the Medium Term Financial Strategy and budget for 2020/21 is set out below.

<b><i>Date</i></b>	<b><i>Meeting</i></b>	<b><i>Action</i></b>
20 November 2019	Policy and Resources Committee	Agree updated MTFS for submission to Council
11 December 2019	Council	Approve updated MTFS
October – December		Develop detailed budget proposals for 2020/21
January 2020	All Service Committees	Consider 20/21 budget proposals
12 February 2020	Policy and Resources Committee	Agree 20/21 budget proposals for recommendation to Council
26 February 2020	Council	Approve 20/21 budget

---

## **8. REPORT APPENDICES**

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 – 2024/25
- Appendix B: Agreed Budget Savings 2020/21 – 2023/24
- Appendix C: Strategic Revenue Projections 2020/21 – 2024/25 – under different scenarios.

---

## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**  
**2020/21 – 2024/25**

**DRAFT**



# CONTENTS

<b>1. Overview and Summary of Medium Term Financial Strategy .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Corporate Objectives and Key Priorities .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. National Context .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. Financial Resources .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5. Scenario Planning .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>6. Spending Plans – Revenue and Capital .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>7. Revenue Projections .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>8. Risk Management.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>9. Consultation .....</b>	<b>28</b>

# 1. OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY OF MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

## Background

- 1.1 The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets out in financial terms how the Council will deliver its Strategic Plan over the next five years. The Council agreed a new Strategic Plan in December 2018 which describes and prioritises our corporate objectives. The MTFS sets out how these objectives will be delivered, given the resources available.
- 1.2 Resources depend first of all on the broad economic environment. The overall picture for the economy is one of slower growth, but it is hoped that growth will resume as the uncertainties around Brexit are resolved. The present government has responded to lower growth and the reaction against austerity by announcing significant new spending initiatives. These initiatives have been in other areas from the public sector from District Councils, so there is not expected to be a direct benefit to this Council. To the extent that the Council wishes to fund new initiatives, it is likely to have to rely on self-generated resources.
- 1.3 Most of the Council's income already comes from Council Tax and other local sources, including parking, planning fees and property income. This relative self-sufficiency provides a level of reassurance, but there is considerable uncertainty about the position for 2021/22 onwards. The Government offered a four year funding settlement to local authorities in 2016, covering the years 2016/17 to 2019/20, and for 2020/21 the funding arrangements have been rolled forward without significant changes, but the future position is very uncertain.
- 1.4 Capital investment faces a different set of constraints. As set out in section 6 below, funds have been set aside for capital investment and further funding is available, in principle, through prudential borrowing. The challenge is to ensure that capital investment is affordable and sustainable, given the return on investment and the cost of finance, and that the overall scale of the capital programme remains proportionate to the Council's overall budget.

## Revenue Projections

- 1.5 The strategic revenue projections underlying the MTFS 2019/20 – 2023/24 suggested that there would be a budget gap of £400,000 in 2020/21, increasing to £2.2 million by the end of the five year period, as follows. The projections were based on a 'neutral' scenario.

**Table 1: Current MTFS Revenue Projections 2019/20 – 2023/24**

	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Council Tax	16.2	16.8	17.5	18.2	18.9
Retained Business Rates	3.2	1.7	0.4	0.5	0.6

Business Rates Growth	1.1	0.0	0.2	0.4	0.7
Budget requirement	20.5	18.5	18.1	19.1	20.2
Fees and Charges	20.8	21.0	21.2	21.4	21.6
Total Funding Available	41.3	39.5	39.3	40.5	41.8
Predicted Expenditure	42.5	41.5	41.2	41.1	42.6
Budget Gap	1.2	2.0	1.9	0.6	0.8
Required Savings – Cumulative	1.2	3.2	5.1	5.7	6.5
Savings identified – Cumulative	1.2	2.8	3.7	4.3	4.3
Still to be identified	0.0	0.4	1.4	1.4	2.2

- 1.6 The MTFS 2020/21 – 2024/25 sets out an updated set of financial projections in section 7. However, it is important to note that projections like these can only represent a best estimate of what will happen. In updating the projections, various potential scenarios have been modelled – adverse, neutral and favourable.
- 1.7 In accordance with legislative requirements the Council must set a balanced budget. The MTFS sets out a proposed approach that seeks to address this.

## 2. CORPORATE OBJECTIVES AND KEY PRIORITIES

2.1 The Council has developed a new Strategic Plan which was approved by Council in December 2018. The development of a new Strategic Plan was brought forward in order to inform the refresh of the Local Plan, which sets out the framework for development in the borough and is due to be completed by April 2022. The new Strategic Plan likewise informs the whole range of other Council strategies and policies.

2.2 The new Strategic Plan went through a thorough process of discussion and refinement over the period June – October 2018 and was approved by Council on 12 December 2018. It sets out four key priorities, as follows:

- Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure
- Homes and Communities
- A Thriving Place
- Safe, Clean and Green.

'Embracing growth and enabling infrastructure' recognises the Council's role in leading and shaping the borough as it grows. This means taking an active role in policy and master planning for key sites in the borough, and where appropriate, investing directly ourselves.

'Homes and communities' expresses the objective of making Maidstone a place where people love to live and can afford to live. This means providing a range of different types of housing, including affordable housing, and meeting our statutory obligations to address homelessness and rough sleeping.

'A thriving place' is a borough that is open for business, attractive for visitors and an enjoyable and prosperous place to live for our residents. We will work to regenerate the County town and rural service centres and will continue to grow our leisure and cultural offer.

A 'safe, clean and green' place is one where the environment is protected and enhanced, where parks, green spaces, streets and public areas are looked after, well-managed and respected, and where people are and feel safe.

2.3 Since the adoption of the Strategic Plan in December 2018, the priority of 'Embracing growth and enabling infrastructure' has been made more explicit through our developing plans for an Innovation Centre, for Maidstone East and a new Garden Community. Investment plans have been approved by Policy and Resources Committee which seek to promote Maidstone as a 'Thriving Place', as well as generating a positive financial return for the Council. The priority of a 'Safe, Clean and Green' place has been emphasised by Council's decision to declare its recognition of global climate and biodiversity emergencies, and to consider adopting a target date of 2030 for the whole of the Borough of Maidstone to be carbon neutral.

2.4 The purpose of the MTFS is to describe the how the outcomes associated with these objectives and priorities can be delivered, given the financial

resources available to the Council, and bearing in mind the prioritisation of objectives. 'Financial resources' include both revenue resources, for day-to-day expenditure, and capital resources, for one-off investment that will deliver benefits over more than a year.

- 2.5 Resources are described in section 4 below. It will be seen that there are constraints on the funding available for the revenue budget, and there are in any case service pressures which must be accommodated. This implies a process of matching resources against the objectives in the Strategic Plan.
- 2.6 Capital investment has hitherto been funded from the New Homes Bonus, internal revenue resources and third party contributions such as Section 106 payments on new developments. From 2019/20 onwards capital investment will increasingly be funded by external borrowing. The constraints on capital expenditure are different from those facing revenue expenditure, because the current local authority funding regime does not set cash limits for borrowing. However, borrowing must be sustainable in terms of the Council's ability to fund interest payments and ultimately repayment of capital. Capital investment plans also depend on having the capacity, in terms of internal resources, to develop projects, work effectively with partners, and secure third party funding.

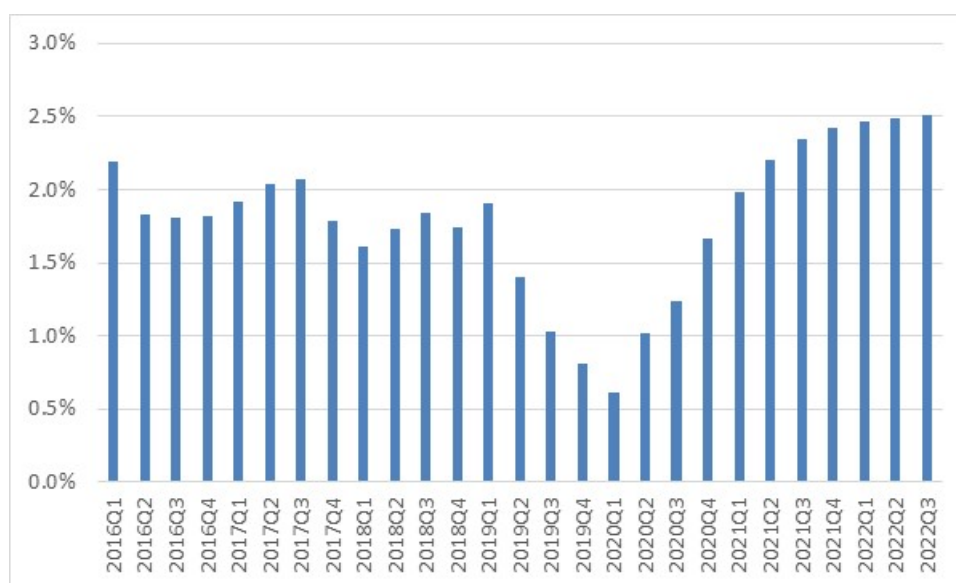
### 3. NATIONAL CONTEXT

#### Economic Outlook 2020 – 2025

- 3.1 The prospects for the national economy depend both on global economic prospects and on the consequences of Brexit. Growth projections in most leading economies, as expressed in Purchasing Managers' Indices, have been falling, particularly where growth is heavily dependent on international trade. The Bank of England has pointed out that UK's composite output PMI is now at the bottom of a range of advanced economies, indicating that the prospects for the UK are further exacerbated by Brexit-related uncertainties.
- 3.2 So far, these uncertainties have led to volatility in economic growth, with businesses stocking up in anticipation of Brexit in March 2019, followed by a slowdown. This has not yet pushed the economy into recession, which is defined as two successive quarters of negative growth: output grew in the three months to the end of August by 0.3% after a contraction of 0.2% in the three months to the end of June.
- 3.3 It remains to be seen whether recession can be avoided in the short term. In the medium term, the Office of Budget Responsibility expects growth in 2019 and 2020 to be slightly below potential, as Brexit uncertainty weighs on the economy. From 2021 onwards, it assumes that Brexit uncertainty will begin to fade and potential productivity growth will pick up, which means that GDP growth would rise<sup>1</sup>. Bank of England projections show a similar picture – see graph below.

**Figure 1: Real UK gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate assuming constant interest rates**

(Source – Bank of England Quarterly Inflation Report August 2019)



- 3.4 The most recent Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) data shows 1.7% for the year to August 2019. The Bank of England projects inflation of 1.92% for

<sup>1</sup> <https://obr.uk/forecasts-in-depth/the-economy-forecast/real-gdp-growth/>

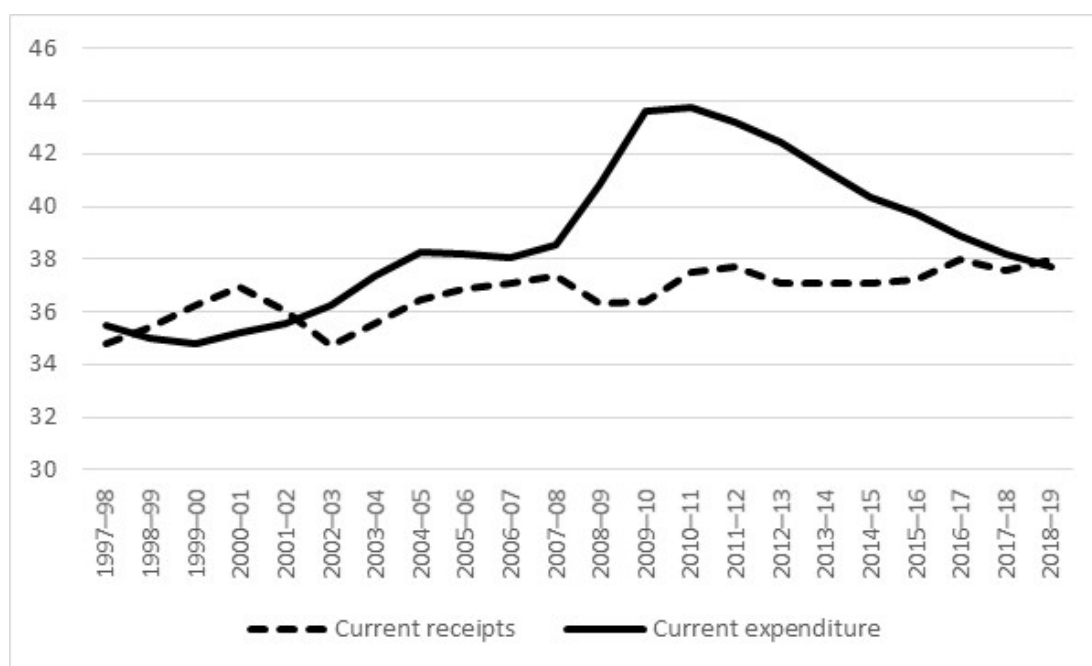
quarter 1 of 2020 assuming constant interest rates. Thereafter, inflation is judged likely to rise slightly above the target inflation rate of 2%, based on domestic inflationary pressures. Over the longer term, policy action will be designed to ensure inflation remains within 1% above or below the target of 2%.

- 3.5 The overall picture for the national economy is therefore for slower growth in the short term before resuming a moderate rate of growth in the medium term. Inflation is projected to increase to above the Bank of England target of 2% next year, but with the expectation that policy action will bring it back in line with target in the longer term.

## Public Finances

- 3.6 After a period of austerity between 2010 and 2017, government spending has come back into line with receipts.

**Figure 2: Current receipts and expenditure as % of national income**

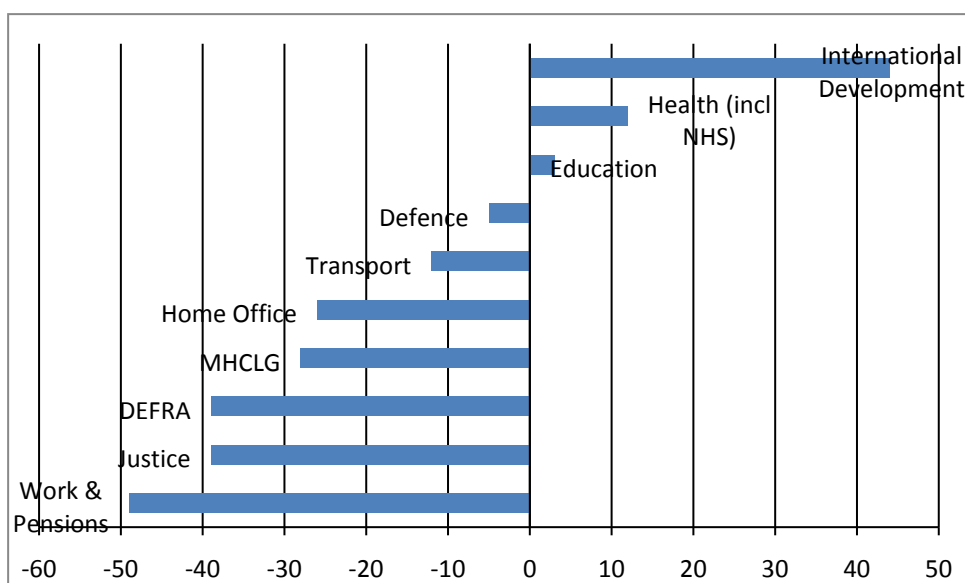


However, the cumulative deficit is at its highest ever level in relation to GDP, at 82% of national income. The government has also now rapidly changed direction following the long period of austerity, with a number of increasingly generous public spending commitments over the past twelve months. This will increase the level of borrowing as a percentage of GDP, even under a smooth Brexit scenario<sup>2</sup>.

- 3.7 Within the overall reduction in public expenditure, there has been a widely disparate pattern between different government departments.

<sup>2</sup> IFS, Green Budget 2019

**Figure 3: Planned real change to Departmental Expenditure Limits 2010-11 – 2019-20 (per cent)**



- 3.8 MHCLG, which provides central government funding for local authorities, has seen some of the biggest cuts. Although the policy of austerity has now been reversed, it is unlikely that local government will see significant benefits given the pressures elsewhere on the public purse, in particular from the NHS.
- 3.9 The effects of austerity in local government have not been spread evenly between authorities. The increasing costs of adult social care and children's social care – services delivered by the upper tier of local government – contribute by far the majority of the funding gap faced by the sector. When local government spending needs are assessed against resources in the planned 2020 Spending Review, it is likely that any rebalancing of public spending will benefit the upper tier authorities that deliver these services, rather than District Councils like Maidstone.
- 3.10 The Queen's Speech on 14 October 2019 announced a White Paper on devolution. This may be the first step towards local government reorganisation, but at this stage it is appropriate to plan on the basis of the Council retaining its current level of autonomy.

## Conclusion

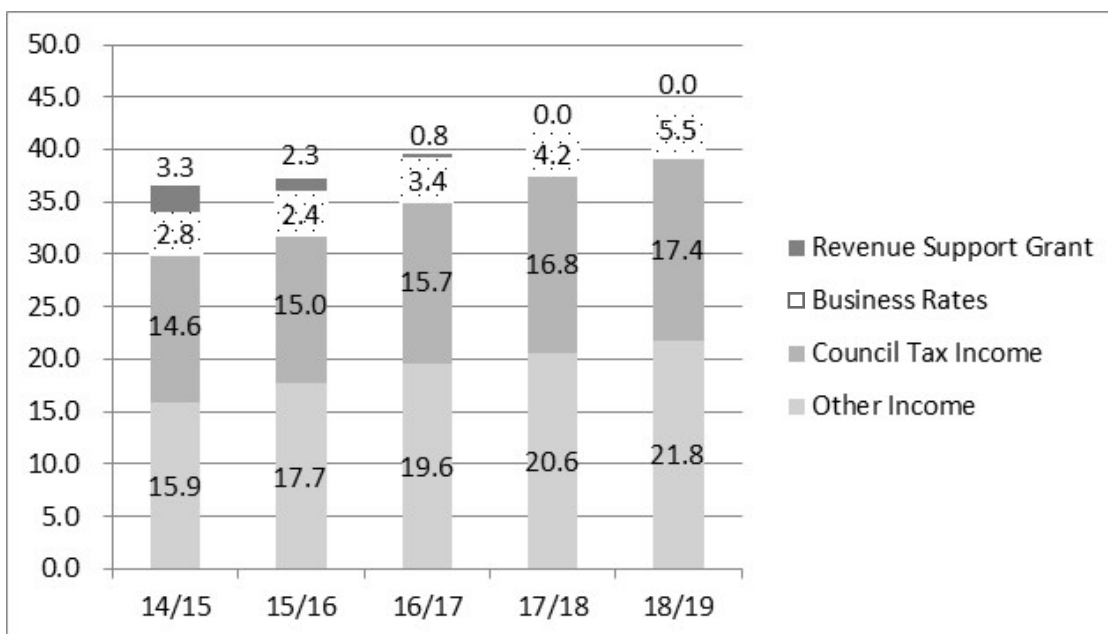
- 3.11 Growth in the national economy is slowing, and is vulnerable to Brexit related uncertainty. Although the government plans aggressive public expenditure which would counter-act any downturn in the economy, there is unlikely to be much direct benefit to District Councils. This Council is already largely self-sufficient, so for financial planning purposes, it needs to assume a continued reliance on self-generated resources, and to maintain a level of reserves that will allow it to withstand external shocks.



## 4. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

- 4.1 The Council's main sources of income are Council Tax and self-generated income from a range of other sources, including parking, planning fees and property investments. It no longer receives direct government support in the form of Revenue Support Grant; although it collects around £60 million of business rates annually, it retains only a small proportion of this.

**Figure 4: Sources of Income (£m)**



### Council Tax

- 4.2 Council Tax is a product of the tax base and the level of tax set by Council. The tax base is a value derived from the number of chargeable residential properties within the borough and their band, which is based on valuation ranges, adjusted by all discounts and exemptions.
- 4.3 The tax base has increased steadily in recent years, reflecting the number of new housing developments in the borough. See table below.

**Table 2: Number of Dwellings in Maidstone**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Number of dwellings	67,721	68,519	69,633	70,843	71,917
% increase compared with previous year	0.81%	1.18%	1.63%	1.74%	1.52%

Note: Number of dwellings is reported each year based on the position shown on the valuation list in September.

- 4.4 The level of council tax increase for 2020/21 is a decision that will be made by Council based on a recommendation made by Policy and Resources Committee. The Council's ability to increase the level of council

tax is limited by the requirement to hold a referendum for increases over a government set limit. The referendum limit for 2019/20 was the greater of 3% or £5.00 for Band D tax payers. Council Tax was increased by the maximum possible, ie £7.56 (3%).

- 4.5 In the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019/20 – 2023/24, it was assumed that the Council Tax base would increase by 2% per annum for the MTFS period, and Band D Council Tax increases would revert to 2% per annum after 2019/20. Given the risk of an economic slowdown, and the fact that growth of 2% per annum has never actually been achieved, a more prudent assumption for increases in the Council Tax base would be 1.5%.

### **Other income**

- 4.6 Other income is an increasingly important source of funding for the Council. It includes the following sources of income:

- Parking
- Shared services
- Commercial property
- Planning fees
- Cremations
- Garden waste collection
- Income generating activity in parks

Where fees and charges are not set by statute, we apply a policy that guides officers and councillors in setting the appropriate level based on demand, affordability and external factors. Charges should be maximised within the limits of the policy, but customer price sensitivity must be taken into account, given that in those areas where we have discretion to set fees and charges, customers are not necessarily obliged to use our services.

- 4.7 In developing the strategic revenue projection for 2020/21 a broad assumption of a 2% increase in future fees and charges has been used for the development of the MTFS, in line with overall inflation assumptions.

### **Business Rates**

- 4.8 Under current funding arrangements, local government retains 50% of the business rates it collects. The aggregate amount collected by local government is redistributed between individual authorities on the basis of perceived need, so that in practice Maidstone Borough Council receives only around 7% of the business rates that it collects.
- 4.9 Prior to the 2017 General Election, the Government was preparing to move to 100% business rates retention with effect from 2020. The additional income would have been accompanied by devolution of further responsibilities to local government. However, the need to accommodate Brexit legislation meant that there was no time to legislate for this. Government now intends to increase the level of business rates retention

to the extent that it is able to do within existing legislation, and plans to introduce 75% business rates retention with effect from 2021/22.

- 4.10 In the meantime, the Autumn 2019 Spending Round announcement assumes a 'roll-forward' settlement for 2020/21, with the existing 50% scheme retained and the amounts retained by individual local authorities increased in line with inflation.
- 4.11 As with 50% business rates retention, the new 75% business rates retention regime will be linked to a mechanism for rates equalisation to reflect local authorities' needs. These will be assessed based on a 'Fair Funding Review'. The overall amounts to be allocated as part of the Fair Funding Review are also subject to a planned Spending Review which is now expected to take place in 2020. It is therefore difficult to predict with any degree of accuracy whether the proportion of business rates retained by Maidstone will remain the same, increase or decrease from 2021/22 onwards.
- 4.12 The current local government funding regime gives authorities the opportunity to pool their business rates income and retain a higher share of growth as compared with a notional baseline set in 2013/14. Maidstone has been a member of the Kent Business Rates pool since 2014/15. Its 30% share of the growth arising from membership of the pool is allocated to a reserve which is used for specific projects that form part of the Council's economic development strategy. A further 30% represents a Growth Fund, spent in consultation with Kent County Council. This has been used to support the Maidstone East development.
- 4.13 It should be noted that in 2021, the baseline will be reset, so all growth accumulated to that point will be reallocated between local authorities as described in paragraph 4.11 above.
- 4.14 A further element of growth was retained locally for one year only in 2018/19 as a result of Maidstone's participation in the Kent & Medway 100% Business Rates Retention pilot. Kent & Medway local authorities were successful in bidding for pilot status, which meant that 100% of business rates growth, rather than 50%, was retained locally. The additional growth was split between a Financial Sustainability Fund (70%) and a Housing and Commercial Growth Fund (30%).
- 4.15 Unfortunately, Kent & Medway was unsuccessful with its bid to form a pilot again in 2019/20, and no further pilots are planned for 2020/21.
- 4.16 Total projected business rates income for 2019/20 and the uses to which it will be put are summarised in the table below.

**Table 3: Projected Business Rates Income 2019/20**

	£000	
Business Rates baseline income	3,208	Included in base budget
Growth in excess of the baseline	1,129	Included in base budget
Pooling gain (MBC share)	315	Funds Economic Development projects
Pooling gain (Growth Fund)	315	Spent in consultation with KCC, eg on Maidstone East
Total	4,967	

- 4.17 Whilst the proportion of total business rates income retained by the Council is relatively small, the amounts retained have grown significantly since the introduction of 50% business rates retention. Pressure on the government to reduce the burden of business rates and the unpredictability of future arrangements for equalising business rates income between Councils place future income growth from this source at risk.

### **Revenue Support Grant**

- 4.18 Maidstone no longer benefits directly from central government support in the form of Revenue Support Grant, as it is considered to have a high level of resources and low needs. In fact, Councils in this situation were due to be penalised by the government under the existing four year funding settlement, through a mechanism to levy a 'tariff / top-up adjustment' – effectively negative Revenue Support Grant. Maidstone was due to pay negative RSG of £1.589 million in 2019/20. However, the government faced considerable pressure to waive negative RSG and removed it in the 2019/20 Local Government Finance Settlement. The government has also stated that it is minded not to levy negative RSG in 2020/21.
- 4.19 From 2021/22 there will be a new local government funding regime. However, it should be noted that a needs-based distribution of funding will continue to create anomalies like negative RSG, so it cannot be assumed that the threat of losing funding in this way (even if the mechanism is different) has gone away.
- 4.20 The potential negative RSG of £1.589 million for 2019/20 was held as a contingency for future funding pressures, to be applied to cushion the impact of likely reductions in resources in the future. Given that it appears that negative RSG will not be levied in 2020/21, it is proposed to continue rolling forward this contingency in anticipation of the impact of the new funding regime in 2021/22.

### **Balances and Earmarked Reserves**

- 4.21 The Council maintains reserves as a safety net to allow for unforeseen circumstances. There is no statutory definition of the minimum level of reserves: the amount required is a matter of judgement. However, the Council has agreed to set £2 million as the minimum General Fund balance.

- 4.22 Within the General Fund balance, amounts have been allocated for specific purposes. These amounts do not represent formal commitments. Instead, they represent the level of reserves considered to be required for specific purposes, including asset replacement, commercialisation and Invest to Save projects.
- 4.23 In addition to unallocated General Fund balances, the Council holds reserves that are earmarked for specific purposes. Full details of reserves held are set out below.

**Table 4: General Fund balances as at 31 March 2019**

	31.3.18 £000	31.3.19 £000
<b>Earmarked Reserves</b>		
New Homes Bonus funding for capital projects	1,404	0
Local Plan Review	200	200
Neighbourhood Plans funding carried forward	70	64
Planning Appeals Contingency	0	300
Accumulated Surplus on Trading Accounts	51	31
Civil Parking Enforcement	481	419
Future Capital Expenditure	0	431
Housing Prevention & Temporary Accommodation	0	700
Unspent Business Rates Growth (Pool and Pilot)	692	3,682
<b>Sub-total Earmarked Reserves</b>	<b>2,898</b>	<b>5,828</b>
Unallocated Balances	9,022	8,620
<b>Total General Fund balances</b>	<b>11,920</b>	<b>14,448</b>

- 4.24 The unallocated balances comfortably exceed the £2 million minimum. They represent around 20% of the gross revenue budget, which is well in excess of the 10% benchmark that is sometimes cited as a reasonable level. It can therefore be seen that the level of reserves is adequate without being excessive.

### **Capital Funding**

- 4.25 Typically, local authorities fund capital expenditure by borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board, which offers rates that are usually more competitive than those available in the commercial sector. Maidstone Borough Council has so far not borrowed to fund its capital programme, instead relying primarily on New Homes Bonus to fund the capital programme. Borrowing has not been required so far in 2019/20, but is likely to be in subsequent years. The cost of any borrowing is factored into the MTFS financial projections.
- 4.26 Public Works Loan Board funding has for several years offered local authorities a cheap source of finance, which has been used more and more extensively. The amount authorised by the Treasury for PWLB lending is currently capped at £95 billion, and with borrowing reaching £85 billion in October 2019, it was announced that the cost of borrowing would be

increased by 100 basis point across the board, with the clear intention of dampening demand for funds. This meant, for example, that the annual interest on a 50 year loan, repayable on maturity, increased from 1.8% to 2.8%. Given that borrowing costs in the market generally remain very low, it is considered likely that local authorities will be able to continue to borrow cheaply from other lenders, if not from the PWLB.

- 4.27 There has been a reduction of the period for which New Homes Bonus would be paid from six years to five in 2017/18 and then to four in 2018/19 and 2019/20. The government has announced its intention of paying New Homes in 2020/21, but under the new Local Government funding regime to be implemented from 2021/22 a new, unspecified mechanism for incentivising housebuilding is envisaged.
- 4.28 External funding is sought wherever possible and the Council has been successful in obtaining Government Land Release Funding for its housing developments and ERDF funding for the Kent Medical Campus Innovation Centre.
- 4.29 Funding is also available through developer contributions (S 106) and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The Community Infrastructure Levy was introduced in Maidstone in October 2018.
- 4.30 The current funding assumptions used in the programme are set out in the table below.

**Table 5: Capital Programme Funding**

	19/20 £000	20/21 £000	21/22 £000	22/23 £000	23/24 £000	Total £000
External sources	6,901	9,179	3,253	2,782	860	22,975
Own resources	15,185	1,082	1,277	1,485	1,682	20,712
Debt	29,667	8,644	9,153	8,371	9,338	65,173
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51,754</b>	<b>18,905</b>	<b>13,683</b>	<b>12,638</b>	<b>11,880</b>	<b>108,860</b>

A review of the schemes in the capital programme will take place during the course of Autumn 2019. Proposals will also be considered for new schemes to be added to the capital programme. The affordability of the capital programme will be considered as part of this review, as it is essential that any borrowing to fund the capital programme is sustainable and affordable in terms of its revenue costs.

- 4.31 Under CIPFA's updated Prudential Code, the Council is now required to produce a Capital Strategy, which is intended to give an overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of local public services, along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future financial sustainability. A Capital Strategy was approved by Council at its meeting on 25 September 2019.

- 4.32 The outcome of the capital programme review and an updated Capital Strategy will be considered by Policy and Resources Committee in January 2020 and an updated capital programme and strategy recommended to Council for approval.

## **5. SCENARIO PLANNING**

- 5.1 Owing to uncertainty arising from the economic environment, and from the lack of clarity about what the government's plans for local government funding will mean for the Council, financial projections have been prepared for three different scenarios, as follows.

### **1. Favourable**

Brexit is accompanied by a government-induced stimulus to the economy, which provides more funding for local government. In the medium term, this generates higher economic growth which more than offsets any potential negative Brexit impacts.

### **2. Neutral**

Current trends are maintained. The Council is able to maintain existing service levels and to fund inflationary increases in expenditure thanks to a steadily growing Council Tax base and regular annual increases in Council Tax. However, without any overall increase in local government spending, new spending pressures have to be funded from within existing resources.

### **3. Adverse**

An adverse outcome from Brexit leads to recession, reducing Council income but increasing service pressures in areas like homelessness, requiring spending cuts in order to ensure that statutory services are maintained.

Details of key assumptions underlying each of these scenarios are set out below.

### **Council Tax**

- 5.2 It is assumed that the Council will take advantage of any flexibility offered by central government and will increase Council Tax up to the referendum limit. The government plans to set a referendum limit of 2% for 2020/21. It is not known at this stage what the referendum limit will be for subsequent years, but it is assumed to be 2%, to align with the government's inflation target. This assumption applies to all three scenarios, as Council Tax is the authority's principal and most reliable source of income, and it would not be prudent to fail to maximise income from this source.
- 5.3 The other key assumption regarding Council Tax is the number of new properties. The number of new properties has been increasing in recent years, from a low of 0.38% in 2014, peaking at 1.74% in 2018. The rate of increase nevertheless remains lower than that implied by Local Plan new homes targets. Assumptions are as follows:

Favourable – 2%

Neutral – 1.5%

Adverse – 1%



- 5.4 The target collection rate for Council Tax is 98%. Current indications are that the actual collection rate for 2019/20 will be at, or very close to, this level. However, in the event of a recession, residents will be under greater financial pressure and this could lead to a lower collection rate. A further 0.5% of income is therefore assumed to be lost in this scenario.

### **Business Rates**

- 5.5 The Council receives only a small proportion of the business rates that it actually collects. In 2020/21, the Government indicated in its Spending Round announcement in September 2019 that it would roll forward the existing arrangements, with an increase in the business rates baseline to reflect inflation.
- 5.6 After 2021, the proportion of business rates retained by the authority will be adjusted to reflect the findings of the Fair Funding Review and the Spending Review. It is very difficult to predict what this will mean in practice. However, for the purposes of revenue projections, a number of assumptions have been made.
- 5.7 The starting point in the government's calculations will be Maidstone's perceived level of need, which in the current four year funding settlement led to the Council being faced with a negative revenue support grant payment of £1.589 million in 2019/20. In the event, this was not levied on the Council, following concerted lobbying by Maidstone and other authorities that faced negative RSG. The amount of negative RSV thus avoided in 2019/20 is being held in reserve to address likely future funding pressures.
- 5.8 The starting point for future business rates income is therefore assumed to be the current baseline share of business rates income, as adjusted for inflation in 2020/21, less £1.589 million. It is not accepted that this would be a fair allocation of business rates income but it is nevertheless prudent to make this assumption for forecasting purposes.
- 5.9 A further factor to be considered is the resetting of the government's business rates baseline in 2021/22. This represents the level above which the Council benefits from a share in business rates growth. It is likely that the government will reset the baseline in order to redistribute resources from those areas that have benefitted most from business rates growth in the years since the current system was introduced in 2013, to those areas that have had lower business rates growth. Accordingly, cumulative business rates growth has been removed from the projections for 2021/22, then is gradually reinstated from 2022/23.
- 5.10 The target collection rate for Business Rates is 98.6%. Current indications are that the actual collection rate for 2019/20 will be closer to 98%. In the event of a recession, businesses will be under greater financial pressure and the number of businesses failures will be higher, leading to a still lower collection rate. A further 2% of income is therefore assumed to be lost in this scenario.

- 5.11 Given these assumptions, the specific assumptions for business rates growth in each scenario are as follows:

Favourable – 2% increase in multiplier plus 2% growth in base

Neutral – 2% increase in multiplier plus 1% growth in base

Adverse – 3% increase in multiplier, 0% growth in base and 2% losses from lower collection rate

### **Inflation**

- 5.12 The most recent Bank of England inflation report recognised an inconsistency between market expectations of inflation, which assume very low interest rates in the near term, and the Bank's own inflation forecasts, which align with its more aggressive assumptions about interest rates. A further potential factor is the impact of any sterling depreciation on input prices, which could push up inflation rates.
- 5.13 For the purpose of forecasting, it is assumed that the government's target rate of inflation is 2% is achieved in the favourable and neutral scenarios. A higher rate of 3% is assumed in the adverse scenario, reflecting the risk of increases in input prices pushing up inflation rates.

#### **Pay inflation**

- 5.14 Pay is the Council's single biggest item of expenditure, accounting for around 50% of total costs. Although the Council sets pay rates independently of any national agreements, in practice it has to pay attention to overall public sector and local authority pay settlements, as these affect the labour market in which the Council operates. It will be difficult for the Council to ignore this, so the assumption about pay inflation in all scenarios is that it will be in line with general inflation assumptions. Furthermore, an additional 0.5% has to be allowed for in pay inflation assumptions arising from the annual cost of performance related incremental increases for staff.

#### **Fees and charges**

- 5.15 The projections imply that fees and charges will increase in line with overall inflation assumptions, to the extent that the Council is able to increase them. In practice, it is not possible to increase all fees and charges by this amount as they are set by statute. Accordingly, the actual increase in income shown in the projections is 50% of the general inflation assumption in each scenario.
- 5.16 A favourable economic climate could be expected to boost fees and charges income above and beyond the rate of inflation. Conversely, in the event of a recession, as assumed under the adverse scenario, a number of the Council's income streams could suffer. In some cases (eg Planning fees) the Council could eventually cut its costs accordingly, although there would be a time lag. However, this does not apply to all income streams. In particular, Parking income is highly sensitive to the overall economy, and there are few mitigations available if income falls. Accordingly, under the adverse scenario, a 2% year on year loss of income is assumed.

## Contract costs

Costs are generally assumed to rise in line with inflation, but a composite rate is applied to take account of higher increases on contracts like waste collection where the growth in the number of households leads to a volume increase as well as an inflation increase.

5.17 Inflation assumptions are summarised as follows.

**Table 6: Inflation Assumptions**

	Favourable	Neutral	Adverse	Comments
General	2.00%	2.00%	3.00%	2% is the government's target inflation rate but there is a risk of higher inflation if sterling depreciates following Brexit
Employee Costs	2.00%	2.00%	3.00%	Neutral assumption is in line with the most recent pay settlement and government inflation targets
	0.50%	0.50%	0.50%	The annual cost of performance related incremental increases for staff
Contract costs	2.00% - 5.00%	2.00% - 5.00%	2.00% - 8.00%	A composite rate is applied, reflecting different pressures on individual contracts
Fees and charges - price	2.00%	2.00%	3.00%	In line with general inflation assumptions
Fees and charges - volume	2.00%	0.00%	-2.00%	Reflects overall economic conditions

## Service Spend

5.18 Strategic Revenue Projections under all scenarios assume that service spend will remain as set out in the previous MTFS, so savings previously agreed by Council will be delivered and no further growth arising from the new Strategic Plan is incorporated. In practice, it is likely that service spending would need to be reduced if the adverse scenario were likely to arise.

5.19 The projections include provision for the revenue cost of the capital programme, comprising interest costs (2.5%) and provision for repayment of borrowing (2%).

## Summary of Projections

5.20 A summary of the financial projections under each of the scenarios is set out in section 7.

## 6. SPENDING PLANS – REVENUE AND CAPITAL

- 6.1 This section sets out current revenue and capital spending plans, so that an assessment can be made as to whether the plans support the Council's strategic priorities, and therefore whether resources are employed appropriately.

### *Revenue*

**Table 7: 2018/19 Revenue Outturn and 2019/20 Savings and Growth**

Committee	Service	2018/19			2019/20	
		Final adjusted budget	Actual outturn for the year	Variance (-Adverse/ Favourable)	Budget savings	Budget growth
		£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
CHE	Communities & Housing	4,444	4,089	355	119	0
	Environment & Public Realm	4,244	4,539	-295	116	-30
ERL	Heritage, Culture & Leisure	1,852	1,951	-99	167	0
	Economic Development	614	576	38	7	0
S P I	Planning Services	1,291	1,507	-216	60	-24
	Parking & Transportation	-1,939	-1,978	39	271	0
P & R	Property & Investment	-79	-300	221	291	0
	Corporate and Shared Services	9,022	8,911	111	151	-27
	<b>Total</b>	<b>19,449</b>	<b>19,294</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>1,182</b>	<b>-81</b>

Details by service area are set out below.

### *Communities and Housing*

- 6.2 This service area supports the corporate priority 'Housing and Communities'. The Housing Service has been successful in managing an increasing workload over the past couple of years, thanks in part to one-off government grant funding, and to local initiatives such as the purchase of property to provide temporary accommodation. The service remains demand-driven, so whilst the number of families in temporary accommodation appears currently to have stabilised at around 100, this could change. Current budgets however assume that the status quo is maintained.
- 6.3 Our project with EY Xantura, funded via the Business Rates Retention pilot one-off resources, seeks to target homelessness prevention interventions and reduce the risks and incidence of homelessness in the medium term.

- 6.4 The capital budget for 2019/20 includes provision for phase 3 of the temporary accommodation investment programme and ongoing expenditure on the Brunswick Street and Union Street developments, both of which are currently in progress.
- 6.5 In the longer term, the Housing Development and Redevelopment Investment Plan and our plans for Council affordable housing are designed to contribute towards meeting housing need across a range of different tenures.

#### *Environment & Public Realm*

- 6.6 These services support the 'clean and green' agenda, as they include street cleaning, grounds maintenance in parks and open spaces, and household waste collection. Waste collection is outsourced and the cost of the service is directly linked to inflation indices. The adverse variance in 2018/19 was owing to a one-off change in accounting treatment of Garden Waste income and has no ongoing implications.
- 6.7 Budgets assume that current service levels are maintained. However, a provision has been included in the MTFS for a potential annual increase in costs of £500,000 when the existing contract with Biffa comes to an end.

#### *Heritage, Culture & Leisure*

- 6.8 This service area helps to make Maidstone a 'thriving place'. It includes the museum, leisure services and bereavement services. Leisure services are seeing significant capital investment at Mote Park with the Adventure Zone and the forthcoming Visitor Centre. This forms part of a long term strategy for Mote Park whereby self-sufficiency is achieved by investment in income generating activities, so the Adventure Zone is projected to deliver £114,000 additional income annually which will contribute towards the running costs of the park. However, it is clear that new visitors also create additional spending pressures in Mote Park generally, highlighting the need for careful forecasting when planning future investment.
- 6.9 The Bereavement service continues to be successful in exceeding its income targets. The business case for further investment in the service is therefore strong.

#### *Economic Development*

- 6.10 Economic Development likewise supports the priority of making Maidstone a thriving place. The Council has a small ongoing revenue budget for economic development, supplemented by funding from the Business Rates Pool. The service also plays a key role in major capital-funded projects including the Kent Medical Campus Innovation Centre and Maidstone East.

#### *Planning Services*

- 6.11 Planning Services provide the essential framework for 'embracing growth and enabling infrastructure'. These services include spatial planning, and

specifically the Local Plan review, infrastructure planning, liaison with developers on major applications, and day-to-day development management and processing of planning applications. The Planning Service is subject to some volatility in income, particularly with major applications, which led to a budget shortfall in 2019/20. This will require careful management. The current MTFS allows for £800,000 to be spent over the next four years on the Local Plan refresh.

- 6.12 There remains a risk of costs in relation to planning appeals, but known likely costs have been provided for in the accounts as at the end of 2018/19.

#### *Parking & Transportation*

- 6.13 Parking and Transportation likewise support growth and infrastructure, as well as serving the priority of making Maidstone a thriving place. The Parking Service traditionally out-performed its income budgets, and budgets were increased accordingly. 2018/19 saw a budget surplus, but the margin was smaller than in previous years, reflecting the fact that more income has been built into the base budget. Future years' income will be heavily dependent on performance of the wider economy and specifically on Maidstone Town Centre's success in attracting visitors.

- 6.14 A saving has been achieved by re-commissioning the Park and Ride service.

#### *Property & Investment*

- 6.15 This service is responsible for the Council's own property and investments. The Council's commercial property investment strategy both generates a financial return and supports the regeneration agenda by investing in the local economy. In recent years the Council has been able successfully to generate additional income from commercial investments. Further capital investment has been undertaken in 2019/20 and is planned in the future.

#### *Corporate & Shared Services*

- 6.16 Corporate services provide the essential support structure to enable all the corporate priorities to be realised. They include central staffing budgets and office accommodation. The Council's future office accommodation needs are under review, with its lease on Maidstone House expiring in 2023. In the meantime, we will seek to maximise value from the space occupied.
- 6.17 Shared Services continue to provide resilience and offer the potential for additional income, eg from lending Internal Audit staff to other authorities and from our debt collection service.

#### *Summary - Revenue*

- 6.18 Most service areas are already scheduled to deliver savings in 2020/21 following previous Council decisions. To the extent that savings cannot be delivered, or additional revenue growth is required in order to meet

strategic priorities, further savings will need to be identified so as to remain within the constraint of an overall standstill budget.

### *Capital*

6.19 In drawing up the capital programme, there has been a focus on schemes that both meet strategic priorities and are self-funding. Major initiatives include the following.

- The Housing Development and Regeneration Investment Plan provides for the Council to develop housing ourselves, following on from the developments at Brunswick Street and Union Street, thereby addressing the need for new homes in the borough and generating long term revenue returns through developing homes for market rent.
- The Affordable Housing programme envisages the acquisition of up to 200 social rented homes on smaller developments, to be managed by a Registered Provider (RP).
- The Commercial Investment Strategy builds on the Council's existing commercial investment property portfolio and assumes that we will continue to expand the portfolio, subject to opportunities arising that generate the required rate of return and support the priority of making Maidstone a thriving place.
- The Kent Medical Campus Innovation Centre, part-funded by the ERDF, will bring new businesses and jobs into the area.

**Table 8: Capital Programme 2019/20 to 2023/24**

	19/20 £000	20/21 £000	21/22 £000	22/23 £000	23/24 £000	Total £000
Brunswick Street - Net Cost	3,441	-100				3,341
Union Street - Net Cost	2,085	-1,843				242
Indicative Schemes	4,124	5,426	3,750	3,750		17,050
Council Affordable Housing			3,750	3,750	7,500	15,000
Disabled Facilities Grants	1,570	800	800	800	800	4,770
Temporary Accommodation	3,236					3,236
Housing Incentives	1,040	175	175	175	175	1,740
Gypsy Site Improvement Works	42					42
CCTV Upgrade and Relocation	150					150
Commercial Waste	180					180
Street Scene Investment	147	25				172
Flood Action Plan	1,000	63				1,063
<b>Communities, Housing &amp; Environment Total</b>	<b>17,015</b>	<b>4,546</b>	<b>8,475</b>	<b>8,475</b>	<b>8,475</b>	<b>46,986</b>
Improvements to Play Areas	422					422
Crematorium and Cemetery	140	130				270

	19/20 £000	20/21 £000	21/22 £000	22/23 £000	23/24 £000	Total £000
Projects						
Mote Park Improvements	374					374
Mote Park Visitor Centre	2,122					2,122
Mote Park Lake - Dam Works	267	1,650	100			2,017
Other Parks Improvements	100					100
Museum Development Plan	11	125	200	64		401
Economic Regeneration & Leisure Total	3,437	1,905	300	64		5,706
High Street Regeneration	547					547
Asset Management / Corporate Property	1,417	467	175	175	175	2,409
Feasibility Studies	113	50	50	50	50	313
Infrastructure Delivery	1,200	600	600	600	600	3,600
Software / PC Replacement	124	287				411
Digital Projects	20	20	20	20	20	100
Acquisition of Commercial Assets	24,850	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	34,850
Kent Medical Campus-Innovation Centre	649	8,250	1,500			10,399
Maidstone East	520					520
Policy & Resources Total	29,440	12,174	4,845	3,345	3,345	53,149
Mall Bus Station Redevelopment	1,540					1,540
Bridges Gyratory Scheme	121					121
Strategic Planning & Infrastructure Total	1,661					1,661
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>51,553</b>	<b>18,625</b>	<b>13,620</b>	<b>11,884</b>	<b>11,820</b>	<b>107,502</b>
Section 106 Contributions / CIL	201	280	63	754	60	1,358
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51,754</b>	<b>18,905</b>	<b>13,683</b>	<b>12,638</b>	<b>11,880</b>	<b>108,860</b>

6.20 A review of the schemes in the capital programme will take place during the course of Autumn 2019 and proposals will be considered for new schemes to be added to the capital programme, whilst ensuring that the overall capital programme is sustainable and affordable in terms of its revenue costs.



## 7. REVENUE PROJECTIONS

- 7.1 It is inherent in the Medium Term Financial Strategy that the Council matches available resources to strategic objectives, such that income and expenditure are balanced and any budget gap is eliminated. In addition to the legal requirement to set a balanced budget for 2020/21, the Council needs to have credible plans in place to address any budget gap in subsequent years. In the interests of prudence, these plans need to address not only a neutral set of projections but also the potential adverse scenario outlined above.
- 7.2 Based on the assumptions set out in Section 5, financial projections indicate a revenue budget position as follows under the different scenarios.

**Table 9: Projected Budget Gap 2020/21 – 2024/25**

	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
<b>Scenario 1 – Favourable</b>					
<b>Budget gap / (surplus)</b>	<b>-0.2</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>1.2</b>
<b>Scenario 2 – Neutral</b>					
<b>Budget gap / (surplus)</b>	<b>-0.1</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.2</b>
<b>Scenario 3 – Adverse</b>					
<b>Budget gap</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>5.5</b>

- 7.3 Current spending plans, as set out in the previous section, have been reviewed for feasibility, affordability and consistency with strategic objectives. As the financial projections indicate a broadly balanced position for 2020/21, no specific targets have been set for savings or increased income generation in this year. However, any service pressures, or initiatives with revenue expenditure implications, will have to be funded from within the overall budget envelope, meaning savings or additional income growth to offset the expenditure growth.
- 7.4 In subsequent years, the projections indicate a likely requirement either to make savings or generate increased income. By planning a build up in reserves that can be released in 2021/22, the MTFS avoids a potential cliff-edge where savings need to be made at short notice.
- 7.5 Detailed budget proposals are currently being developed, prior to consideration by Service Committees and the wider stakeholder group in January 2020.
- 7.6 The following table compares the position in the neutral scenario for a 2% Council Tax increase with that for a Council Tax freeze, as requested by Members at the meeting of Policy and Resources Committee on 23 July 2019.

**Table 10: Projected Budget Gap with Council Tax freeze**

	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m

<b>Neutral Scenario – Council Tax increase 2% per annum</b>					
<b>Budget gap</b>	<b>-0.1</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.2</b>

<b>Neutral Scenario – Council Tax freeze</b>					
<b>Budget gap</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>4.0</b>

Assuming all other factors remained unchanged, freezing Council Tax would lead to a budget gap of £200,000 in 2020/21. Over the longer term, it can be seen that not increasing Council Tax in line with inflation increases the budget gap to a level which risks being unmanageable.

## **8. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 8.1 As indicated in the previous sections, the Council's MTFS is subject to a high degree of risk and certainty. In order to address this in a structured way and to ensure that appropriate mitigations are developed, the Council has developed a budget risk register. This seeks to capture all known budget risks and to present them in a readily comprehensible way. The budget risk register is updated regularly and is reviewed by the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee at each meeting.
- 8.2 The major risk areas that have been identified as potentially threatening the Medium Term Financial Strategy are as follows.
- Failure to contain expenditure within agreed budgets
  - Fees and Charges fail to deliver sufficient income
  - Commercialisation fails to deliver additional income
  - Planned savings are not delivered
  - Shared services fail to meet budget
  - Council holds insufficient balances
  - Inflation rate predictions in MTFS are inaccurate
  - Adverse impact from changes in local government funding
  - Constraints on council tax increases
  - Capital programme cannot be funded
  - Increased complexity of government regulation
  - Collection targets for Council Tax and Business Rates missed
  - Business Rates pool fails to generate sufficient growth
  - Adverse financial consequences from a disorderly Brexit
- 8.3 It is recognised that this is not an exhaustive list. By reviewing risks on a regular basis, it is expected that any major new risks will be identified and appropriate mitigations developed.
- 8.4 An assessment of the relative impact and likelihood of the risks identified is set out below.

**Table 11: Budget Risk Matrix**

<i>Likelihood</i>	5					
	4			L	H,N	
	3		M	G, I	B	
	2		E	C	A,D	J
	1		K	F		
		1	2	3	4	5
		<i>Impact</i>				

Black – Top risk

Red – High risk

Amber – Medium risk

Green – Low risk

Blue – Minimal risk

Key

- A. Failure to contain expenditure within agreed budgets
- B. Fees and Charges fail to deliver sufficient income
- C. Commercialisation fails to deliver additional income
- D. Planned savings are not delivered
- E. Shared services fail to meet budget
- F. Council holds insufficient balances
- G. Inflation rate predictions in MTFS are inaccurate
- H. Adverse impact from changes in local government funding
- I. Constraints on council tax increases
- J. Capital programme cannot be funded
- K. Increased complexity of government regulation
- L. Collection targets for Council Tax and Business Rates missed
- M. Business Rates pool fails to generate sufficient growth
- N. Adverse financial impact from a disorderly Brexit

- 8.5 For all risks shown on the Budget Risk Register, appropriate controls have been identified and their effectiveness is monitored on a regular basis.

## **9. CONSULTATION**

- 9.1 Each year the Council carries out consultation as part of the development of the MTFS. A consultation is currently under way and the results will be taken into account by Members when they consider detailed budget proposals in January 2020.
- 9.2 Consultation will also be carried out in December 2019 – January 2020 on the detailed budget proposals. Individual Service Committees will consider the budget proposals relating to the services within their areas of responsibility. Full details of the proposals will be published and residents' and businesses' views welcomed.

## Document History

Date	Description	Details of changes
21.10.19	Draft to Service Committees	

Service	Proposal	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	Total
		£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
C C T V	Commissioning review	-25				-25
Voluntary Sector Grants	Phased reduction of grants	-11	-11			-22
C C T V	Cease monitoring of cameras	-155				-155
Depot/Grounds Maintenance	Commercial Income Growth	-50				-50
Community Services	Review of Community Services	-50				-50
Gypsy & Caravan Sites	Transfer of sites to KCC		-25			-25
<b>Total Communities, Housing &amp; Environment</b>		<b>-291</b>	<b>-36</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-327</b>
Festivals & Events	Cease direct delivery of festivals and events	-10				-10
Mote Park Centre	Income from new Café	-40				-40
Economic Development	Business Terrace Phase 4	-20				-20
Museum	Reprofile NNDR saving	-119				-119
Bereavement Services	Income from investment in chapel	-15	-15			-30
<b>Total Economic Regeneration &amp; Leisure</b>		<b>-204</b>	<b>-15</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-219</b>
New commercial investments	Income from new acquisitions	-143	-143	-143		-429
Elections	Spread elections cost over 4 years		-28			-28
Housing & Regeneration	Income from new developments	-542	-598	-400	-200	-1,740
Communications	Review of communications	-30				-30
Elections	Change in legislation for annual canvas 2020	-25				-25
Maidstone House	Rental income from sub-letting space	-20				-20
Maidstone House	General facilities review	-5				-5
Debt recovery	Increased profit share	-25				-25
Internal Audit	Increased income generation	-20				
Asset management	Implement recommendations of Gen2 review	-25	-25			-50
<b>Total Policy &amp; Resources</b>		<b>-835</b>	<b>-794</b>	<b>-543</b>	<b>-200</b>	<b>-2,352</b>
Development Management	Cost reduction following adoption of 2017 Local	-40				-40
Pay & Display Car Parks	5% increase in income	-100				-100
Grants to outside bodies	Phased reduction of grants	-16	-15			-31
Parking Services	Increase income budget	-50	-50	-50		-150
Planning Policy	Offset staff costs with CIL	-15	-15	-15		-45
Planning	Adoption of commercial business practices	-30	-15	-15		-60
Planning	Income generation from PPAs and Pre-application	-15				-15
Building Control	Increase income budget	-15				-15
<b>Total Strategic Planning, Sustainability &amp; Transportation</b>		<b>-281</b>	<b>-95</b>	<b>-80</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-456</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL EXISTING SAVINGS</b>		<b>-1,611</b>	<b>-940</b>	<b>-623</b>	<b>-200</b>	<b>-3,374</b>

Negative figures shown above represent a reduction in expenditure budgets, or increased income targets.  
Positive figures indicate increased expenditure, or a reduction in the income budget.

**REVENUE ESTIMATE 2020/21 TO 2024/25  
STRATEGIC REVENUE PROJECTION - NEUTRAL**

2019/20 £000		2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000
<b>PROJECTED INCOME</b>						
16,157 17	COUNCIL TAX EMPTY HOMES PREMIUM	16,728	17,318	17,929	18,562	19,218
3,208	RETAINED BUSINESS RATES	3,269	1,681	1,715	1,749	1,784
1,129	BUSINESS RATES GROWTH	1,152	0	180	362	546
49	LEVY ACCOUNT SURPLUS					
-85	COLLECTION FUND ADJUSTMENT					
<b>20,475</b>	<b>PROJECTED NET BUDGET</b>	<b>21,148</b>	<b>18,999</b>	<b>19,824</b>	<b>20,673</b>	<b>21,547</b>
20,839	OTHER INCOME - EXISTING	21,048	21,258	21,471	21,685	21,902
0	OTHER INCOME - NEW INVESTMENTS	673	900	310	765	1,484
<b>41,314</b>	<b>TOTAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE</b>	<b>42,869</b>	<b>41,158</b>	<b>41,605</b>	<b>43,124</b>	<b>44,933</b>
<b>PROJECTED EXPENDITURE</b>						
38,853	<b>CURRENT SPEND</b>	41,314	42,869	41,158	41,605	43,124
	<b>INFLATION &amp; CONTRACT INCREASES</b>					
997	PAY, NI & INFLATION INCREASES	999	1,029	1,059	1,090	1,122
40	MAIDSTONE HOUSE RENT INCREASE					
	<b>EXTERNAL BUDGET PRESSURES</b>					
6	PENSION DEFICIT FUNDING	150	150	150		
	<b>LOCAL PRIORITIES</b>					
-400	PLANNING APPEALS					
-100	PLANNING ENFORCEMENT					
	LOCAL PLAN REVIEW			-200		
131	GROWTH TO MEET STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	24				
	ADDITIONAL GROWTH AGREED BY P&R	10	-10			
50	GENERAL GROWTH PROVISION	50	50	50	50	50
-20	ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT					
91	OTHER SERVICE PRESSURES					
	PROVISION FOR MAJOR CONTRACTS				500	
78	REVENUE COSTS OF CAPITAL PROGRAMME	1,836	640	634	630	730
1,589	CONTINGENCY FOR FUTURE PRESSURES		-1,589			
<b>41,314</b>	<b>TOTAL PREDICTED REQUIREMENT</b>	<b>44,383</b>	<b>43,139</b>	<b>42,851</b>	<b>43,875</b>	<b>45,026</b>
	<b>SAVINGS REQUIRED</b>	<b>-1,515</b>	<b>-1,982</b>	<b>-1,245</b>	<b>-751</b>	<b>-93</b>
	<b>EXISTING SAVINGS</b>	<b>1,611</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>NEW / AMENDED SAVINGS PROPOSALS</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>SURPLUS / (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>-1,042</b>	<b>-622</b>	<b>-551</b>	<b>-93</b>
	<b>CUMULATIVE SURPLUS / (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>-946</b>	<b>-1,568</b>	<b>-2,119</b>	<b>-2,212</b>



**REVENUE ESTIMATE 2020/21 TO 2024/25  
STRATEGIC REVENUE PROJECTION - FAVOURABLE**

2019/20 £000		2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000
<b>PROJECTED INCOME</b>						
16,157 17	COUNCIL TAX EMPTY HOMES PREMIUM	16,810	17,489	18,196	18,931	19,696
3,208	RETAINED BUSINESS RATES	3,269	1,681	1,715	1,749	1,784
1,129	BUSINESS RATES GROWTH	1,152	0	360	728	1,102
49	LEVY ACCOUNT SURPLUS					
-85	COLLECTION FUND ADJUSTMENT					
<b>20,475</b>	<b>PROJECTED NET BUDGET</b>	<b>21,231</b>	<b>19,170</b>	<b>20,271</b>	<b>21,408</b>	<b>22,582</b>
20,839	OTHER INCOME - EXISTING	21,048	21,258	21,471	21,685	21,902
0	OTHER INCOME - NEW INVESTMENTS	673	900	310	765	1,484
<b>41,314</b>	<b>TOTAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE</b>	<b>42,951</b>	<b>41,329</b>	<b>42,052</b>	<b>43,858</b>	<b>45,968</b>
<b>PROJECTED EXPENDITURE</b>						
38,853	<b>CURRENT SPEND</b>	41,314	42,951	41,329	42,052	43,858
	<b>INFLATION &amp; CONTRACT INCREASES</b>					
997	PAY, NI & INFLATION INCREASES	999	1,029	1,059	1,090	1,122
40	MAIDSTONE HOUSE RENT INCREASE					
	<b>EXTERNAL BUDGET PRESSURES</b>					
6	PENSION DEFICIT FUNDING	150	150	150		
	<b>LOCAL PRIORITIES</b>					
-400	PLANNING APPEALS					
-100	PLANNING ENFORCEMENT					
	LOCAL PLAN REVIEW			-200		
131	GROWTH TO MEET STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	24				
	ADDITIONAL GROWTH AGREED BY P&R	10	-10			
50	GENERAL GROWTH PROVISION	50	50	50	50	50
-20	ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT					
91	OTHER SERVICE PRESSURES					
	PROVISION FOR MAJOR CONTRACTS				500	
78	REVENUE COSTS OF CAPITAL PROGRAMME	1,836	640	634	630	730
1,589	CONTINGENCY FOR FUTURE PRESSURES		-1,589			
<b>41,314</b>	<b>TOTAL PREDICTED REQUIREMENT</b>	<b>44,383</b>	<b>43,222</b>	<b>43,022</b>	<b>44,322</b>	<b>45,761</b>
	<b>SAVINGS REQUIRED</b>	<b>-1,432</b>	<b>-1,893</b>	<b>-970</b>	<b>-463</b>	<b>207</b>
	<b>EXISTING SAVINGS</b>	<b>1,611</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>NEW / AMENDED SAVINGS PROPOSALS</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>SURPLUS / (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>-953</b>	<b>-347</b>	<b>-263</b>	<b>207</b>
	<b>CUMULATIVE SURPLUS / (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>-774</b>	<b>-1,121</b>	<b>-1,385</b>	<b>-1,177</b>

e

**REVENUE ESTIMATE 2020/21 TO 2024/25  
STRATEGIC REVENUE PROJECTION - ADVERSE**

2019/20 £000		2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000
<b>PROJECTED INCOME</b>						
16,157 17	COUNCIL TAX EMPTY HOMES PREMIUM	16,645	17,148	17,666	18,199	18,749
3,208	RETAINED BUSINESS RATES	3,237	1,648	1,665	1,682	1,698
1,129	BUSINESS RATES GROWTH	1,140	0	0	0	0
49	LEVY ACCOUNT SURPLUS					
-85	COLLECTION FUND ADJUSTMENT					
<b>20,475</b>	<b>PROJECTED NET BUDGET</b>	<b>21,023</b>	<b>18,796</b>	<b>19,331</b>	<b>19,881</b>	<b>20,447</b>
20,839	OTHER INCOME - EXISTING	21,152	21,469	21,791	22,118	22,450
0	OTHER INCOME - NEW INVESTMENTS	673	900	310	765	1,484
<b>41,314</b>	<b>TOTAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE</b>	<b>42,847</b>	<b>41,166</b>	<b>41,432</b>	<b>42,764</b>	<b>44,381</b>
<b>PROJECTED EXPENDITURE</b>						
38,853	<b>CURRENT SPEND</b>	41,314	42,847	41,166	41,432	42,764
	<b>INFLATION &amp; CONTRACT INCREASES</b>					
997	PAY, NI & INFLATION INCREASES	1,474	1,540	1,609	1,681	1,757
40	MAIDSTONE HOUSE RENT INCREASE					
	<b>EXTERNAL BUDGET PRESSURES</b>					
6	PENSION DEFICIT FUNDING	150	150	150		
	<b>LOCAL PRIORITIES</b>					
-400	PLANNING APPEALS					
-100	PLANNING ENFORCEMENT					
	LOCAL PLAN REVIEW			-200		
131	GROWTH TO MEET STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	24				
	ADDITIONAL GROWTH AGREED BY P&R	10	-10			
50	GENERAL GROWTH PROVISION	50	50	50	50	50
-20	ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT					
91	OTHER SERVICE PRESSURES					
	PROVISION FOR MAJOR CONTRACTS				500	
78	REVENUE COSTS OF CAPITAL PROGRAMME	1,836	640	634	630	730
1,589	CONTINGENCY FOR FUTURE PRESSURES		-1,589			
<b>41,314</b>	<b>TOTAL PREDICTED REQUIREMENT</b>	<b>44,858</b>	<b>43,629</b>	<b>43,408</b>	<b>44,293</b>	<b>45,301</b>
	<b>SAVINGS REQUIRED</b>	<b>-2,011</b>	<b>-2,463</b>	<b>-1,976</b>	<b>-1,529</b>	<b>-921</b>
	<b>EXISTING SAVINGS</b>	<b>1,611</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>NEW / AMENDED SAVINGS PROPOSALS</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>SURPLUS / (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>-400</b>	<b>-1,523</b>	<b>-1,353</b>	<b>-1,329</b>	<b>-921</b>
	<b>CUMULATIVE SURPLUS / (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>-400</b>	<b>-1,923</b>	<b>-3,276</b>	<b>-4,604</b>	<b>-5,525</b>

**REVENUE ESTIMATE 2020/21 TO 2024/25**  
**STRATEGIC REVENUE PROJE+AS2CTION - COUNCIL TAX FREEZE**

2019/20 £000		2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000
<b>PROJECTED INCOME</b>						
16,157 17	COUNCIL TAX EMPTY HOMES PREMIUM	16,400	16,646	16,895	17,149	17,406
3,208	RETAINED BUSINESS RATES	3,269	1,681	1,715	1,749	1,784
1,129 49	BUSINESS RATES GROWTH LEVY ACCOUNT SURPLUS	1,152	0	180	362	546
-85	COLLECTION FUND ADJUSTMENT					
<b>20,475</b>	<b>PROJECTED NET BUDGET</b>	<b>20,820</b>	<b>18,327</b>	<b>18,790</b>	<b>19,260</b>	<b>19,736</b>
20,839 0	OTHER INCOME - EXISTING OTHER INCOME - NEW INVESTMENTS	21,048 673	21,258 900	21,471 310	21,685 765	21,902 1,484
<b>41,314</b>	<b>TOTAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE</b>	<b>42,541</b>	<b>40,485</b>	<b>40,571</b>	<b>41,711</b>	<b>43,122</b>
<b>PROJECTED EXPENDITURE</b>						
38,853	<b>CURRENT SPEND</b>	41,314	42,541	40,485	40,571	41,711
	<b>INFLATION &amp; CONTRACT INCREASES</b>					
997 40	PAY, NI & INFLATION INCREASES MAIDSTONE HOUSE RENT INCREASE	999	1,029	1,059	1,090	1,122
	<b>EXTERNAL BUDGET PRESSURES</b>					
6	PENSION DEFICIT FUNDING	150	150	150		
	<b>LOCAL PRIORITIES</b>					
-400	PLANNING APPEALS					
-100	PLANNING ENFORCEMENT					
	LOCAL PLAN REVIEW			-200		
131	GROWTH TO MEET STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	24				
	ADDITIONAL GROWTH AGREED BY P&R	10	-10			
50	GENERAL GROWTH PROVISION	50	50	50	50	50
-20	ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT					
91	OTHER SERVICE PRESSURES					
	PROVISION FOR MAJOR CONTRACTS				500	
78	REVENUE COSTS OF CAPITAL PROGRAMME	1,836	640	634	630	730
1,589	CONTINGENCY FOR FUTURE PRESSURES		-1,589			
<b>41,314</b>	<b>TOTAL PREDICTED REQUIREMENT</b>	<b>44,383</b>	<b>42,811</b>	<b>42,178</b>	<b>42,841</b>	<b>43,613</b>
	<b>SAVINGS REQUIRED</b>	<b>-1,843</b>	<b>-2,326</b>	<b>-1,607</b>	<b>-1,130</b>	<b>-491</b>
	<b>EXISTING SAVINGS</b>	<b>1,611</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>NEW / AMENDED SAVINGS PROPOSALS</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>SURPLUS / (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>-232</b>	<b>-1,386</b>	<b>-984</b>	<b>-930</b>	<b>-491</b>
	<b>CUMULATIVE SURPLUS / (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>-232</b>	<b>-1,618</b>	<b>-2,602</b>	<b>-3,532</b>	<b>-4,024</b>

# Agenda Item 15

## Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

12 November 2019

### Housing Allocation Scheme Review

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Communities, Housing and Environment Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	John Littlemore – Head of Housing and Community Services
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Tony Stewart – Homechoice and Strategy Team Leader
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

#### Executive Summary

The Homelessness Strategy review identified an action to reconsider the Council's Allocation Scheme following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act. This report proposes to amend the Allocation Scheme to support the Council's strategic objective of supporting early homelessness prevention, encouraging households to remain in their current accommodation and avoid the use of temporary accommodation whenever possible and revise other sections of the scheme so that it remains compliant with current legislation.

#### Purpose of Report

This report is detailing proposed changes to the Council's Allocation Scheme. Significant policy changes to the Allocation Scheme must be approved by the relevant Committee.

Amendments to the scheme are being proposed to support homelessness prevention by giving additional preference to households threatened with homelessness and discouraging the use of temporary accommodation as a way of accessing social housing quicker.

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

1. That the Communities, Housing & Environment Committee agrees the proposed changes to the Council's Allocations Scheme

#### Timetable

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Corporate Leadership Team	3 September 2019
Members Briefing	7 October 2019
Communities, Housing and Environment Committee	12 November 2019

# Housing Allocation Scheme Review

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	The Housing Allocation Scheme assists in the delivery of the council's corporate priorities. We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities. However, they will support the Council's overall achievement of its aims as set out in section 4 (preferred alternative).	John Littlemore – Head of Housing and Community Services
<b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>	The report recommendations support the achievements of both the 'Health Inequalities are addressed and reduced' and 'Deprivation and Social Mobility is improved' cross cutting objectives by ensuring that the Council has an Allocation Scheme that treats all applicants fairly and that access to social housing supports the needs of residents.	John Littlemore – Head of Housing and Community Services
<b>Risk Management</b>	The risks associated with this proposal have been set out in the body of the report	John Littlemore – Head of Housing and Community Services
<b>Financial</b>	The proposals set out in the recommendation acknowledge that there could be an increase to the cost of providing temporary accommodation in the short term but if successful the new approach is likely to create the scenario for additional savings to that envisaged by the MTFS.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Staffing</b>	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	John Littlemore – Head of Housing and Community Services

<b>Legal</b>	The amendments to the scheme ensure that it is consistent with current Government Guidance and complies with the Housing Act 1996.	Legal Team
<b>Privacy and Data Protection</b>	Accepting the recommendations will ensure that the Allocation Scheme is compliant with current regulations.	Policy and Information Team
<b>Equalities</b>	An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken. A copy is attached at <b>Appendix C</b>	Policy & Information Manager
<b>Public Health</b>	The aim of the proposed changes is to reduce the need for temporary accommodation, which in turn will provide for better health and well-being for residents who find themselves threatened with homelessness.	Public Health Officer
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	The recommendations will have a no impact on Crime and Disorder.	John Littlemore – Head of Housing and Community Services
<b>Procurement</b>	N/A	John Littlemore – Head of Housing and Community Services

## **2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Nominations made by the Council to housing association vacancies are governed by Part 6 Housing Act 1996 (as amended). The Act requires that nominations may only come from the Council's Housing Register and the Act provides the framework that sets out who can join the Housing Register and how priority is determined between applicants. The Council's interpretation of the framework legislation must be set out in a document adopted by the Council and called an Allocation Scheme. The adopted Allocation Scheme must be published and available upon request.
- 2.2 The Council's Housing Allocation Scheme is designed to ensure that access to subsidised housing supports the needs of residents, the corporate aims of the Council and reflects current legislation.
- 2.3 The current Allocation Scheme was introduced in 2013. The policy is designed to make best use of the limited stock available and awards additional priority to applicants in work or who assist the local community in other ways, such as serving in the Armed Forces or undertaking voluntary work.
- 2.4 Minor amendments to the Allocation Scheme can be made with the agreement of the Director of Regeneration and Place in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Housing & Environment Committee. Several minor amendments have been made since the policy was introduced in 2013. However, since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act and the enhanced homelessness prevention service within the Housing and Inclusion Team, more significant changes to the scheme are now required, which require the Committee's approval.
- 2.5 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which was introduced in April 2018, amended the current legislation to increase the period in which a person is deemed to be threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days. This provides a longer period in which to work with households who are threatened with homelessness.
- 2.6 There are two causes of homelessness that are most prevalent. These are homelessness from the private rented sector and families no longer accommodating their relative/friends. If the landlord is determined to regain possession, it is difficult to prevent the homelessness from the private rented sector.
- 2.7 Greater scope exists to persuade households within family arrangements to enable the applicant to remain if they understand that there is a better opportunity for the household to be housed in a reasonable period. The proposed change to the Allocation Scheme will give the Housing Advice Officer the ability to negotiate a position with the family to keep hold of the applicant without the need for them to go into temporary accommodation.
- 2.8 The table below shows the number and percentage of homeless applicants where their accommodation at the time of applying was living with friends or family compared to those who are renting privately or through social housing.

### Homeless Applicants – April 2018 to August 2019

	Private / Social Rented	Living with friends or family
Not placed in temporary accommodation	422 (32%)	370 (28%)
Placed in temporary accommodation	101 (21%)	142 (30%)

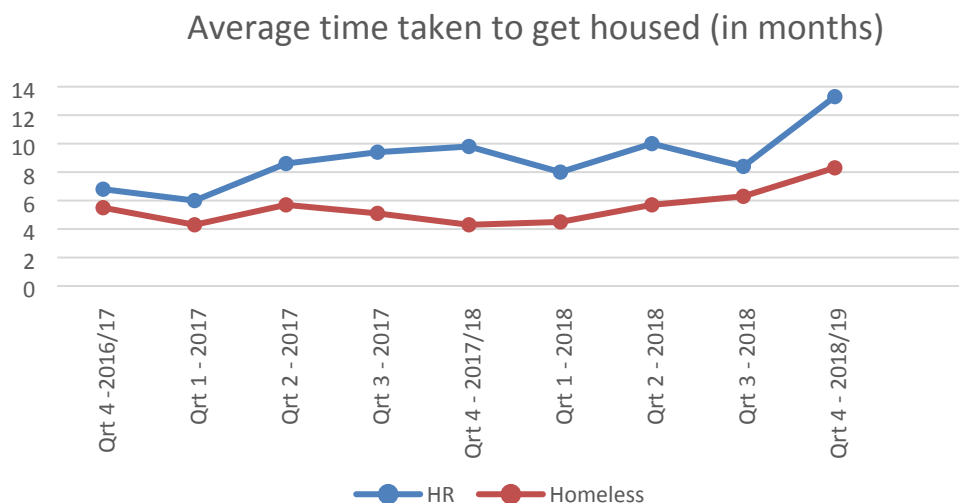
This indicates that at the time of the application there was a slightly higher percentage of applicants living in private or social rented accommodation (32%) than with either friends or family (28%); but that a much higher percentage of those living with friends or family (30%) end up being provided with temporary accommodation than those who were living in private or social rented accommodation (21%).

- 2.9 Giving applicants who are threatened with homelessness additional opportunity to secure housing through the housing register would support Housing Officers prevention work, particularly when encouraging applicants to remain with friends and family, as this will give them a greater prospect of securing social housing than if they were to become homeless and placed in temporary accommodation.
- 2.10 The Allocation Scheme allows the Council to match an applicant with a suitable property, known as 'Direct Letting,' to end a household's Main Housing Duty or Relief Duty, as reflected in the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- 2.11 To minimise the length of stay in temporary accommodation for the applicant and thereby the financial cost to the Council, Direct Letting is often used to allocate social housing to households who have been placed in temporary accommodation. During 2018-19, the number of homeless households housed increased. However, during the same period the number of households who were successfully housed from the Housing Register reduced significantly as less properties were advertised for applicants.

	Q1 18-19	Q2 18-19	Q3 18-19	Q4 18-19
Homeless - households housed	56	73	72	79
Housing register - households housed	117	79	53	49

- 2.12 This has resulted in households who the Housing and Inclusion Team are working with to prevent their homelessness, along with applicants who have another housing need other than homelessness, waiting for social housing for an increasing length of time.





- 2.13 Households who are becoming homeless and being placed in temporary accommodation are increasingly being housed quicker than applicants who are able to stay in their current accommodation and work with Housing Officers to prevent their homelessness occurring.
- 2.14 Anecdotal information suggests that applicants have become aware that by being placed in temporary accommodation they have a better chance of securing a new tenancy more quickly. This discourages households from staying in their current tenancy if possible and undermines the work of Housing Officers trying to prevent homelessness.
- 2.15 Households could be encouraged to avoid being placed in temporary accommodation by being incentivised to stay in their current housing. This might be achieved by giving applicants additional opportunity to secure permanent housing through the Housing Register. Paragraphs 3.1 to 3.12 sets out how this will be achieved.
- 2.16 There are also some further changes being proposed to other parts of the scheme to clarify and amend some points. These are intended to provide clarity for applicants and officers in applying the scheme based on feedback received from stakeholders and service users.
- 2.17 A table detailing the changes and the reasons for them is attached at **Appendix A**.
- 2.18 A copy of the amended Housing Allocation Scheme version 2.1 is attached at **Appendix B**.

### 3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 To encourage households to remain in their current accommodation and avoid the use of temporary accommodation whenever possible, it is proposed to give greater opportunity to those applicants who are owed a homelessness prevention duty under s.195(2) of the Housing Act 1996.
- 3.2 **Option A** – Households who are owed a prevention duty are placed in the current 'Band A – Community Contribution.' A greater number of properties per applicant will be advertised for applicants within this band.
- 3.3 Households to whom either a Relief Duty or a Main Housing Duty is owed will be placed in the current 'Band D – Homeless Applicants.' Fewer properties will be advertised for applicants within this band therefore discouraging the use of temporary accommodation to obtain social housing quicker.
- 3.4 The use of 'Direct Letting' will be reduced and only considered to end a housing duty when all other options have been exhausted. This will result in more vacant properties being advertised for applicants to place bids on.
- 3.5 The Housing Register bands will be renamed to greater reflect the qualifying criteria for being placed in them, as the current system of bands A-D has wrongly been interpreted as denoting priority:
- Band C – Community Contribution and Homeless Prevention
  - Band H – Homeless
  - Band M – Medical and Health Assistance
  - Band R – Reasonable Preference
- 3.6 In accordance with the Allocation Scheme, the number of properties allocated to each band is currently set at the beginning of each financial year. This will need to be amended to reflect the number of households that will be placed within each of the bands once the new criteria is applied.
- 3.7 The Housing Register, as of September 2019, consisted of 796 households who are placed in the following bands:

	% of households of total register	Current quota of properties advertised to band
Band A – Community Contribution	33%	35%
Band B – Health Assistance	7%	10%
Band C – Reasonable Preference	57%	45%
Band D - Homeless	3%	10%

- 3.8 By applying the new band criteria to the households registered in September 2019, the number placed within each band changes to the following:

	% of households of total register	Proposed quota of properties advertised to band
Band C – Community Contribution and Homeless Prevention	39%	50%
Band H - Homeless	16%	10%

Band M – Medical and Health Assistance	7%	10%
Band R – Reasonable Preference	38%	30%

3.9 By applying the new criteria, a number of households will be moved between bands:

- Applicants given greater priority – moved from old Band C (Reasonable preference) to new Band C (Community Contribution and Homeless Prevention) = 69 (8% of the total housing register)
- Applicants given lesser priority – moved from old Band A (Community Contribution) or old Band C (Reasonable Preference) to new band H (Homeless) = 102 (13% of the total housing register)

3.10 There are currently approximately 80 households placed in temporary accommodation. Unless they have a medical issue, which means they will remain in the 'Medical and Health Assistance' band, these applicants will be placed in the new Band H – Homeless. These are made up of the following household compositions:

- Single Persons – 34
- Family with 1 child – 18
- Family with 2+ children – 29
- Other households - 2

There are currently 24 households placed in temporary accommodation who were living with friends or family when applying as homeless.

3.11 It is proposed that the above recommendations are implemented for an initial trial period of 12 months in order to gain an understanding of the effect on the number of households that are placed in temporary accommodation and length of time they remain there.

3.12 Other amendments, as detailed in **Appendix A**, are proposed to the Allocation Scheme to provide clarification, to make other changes not associated with the above points and to ensure it remains compliant with current legislation.

3.13 **Option B** – Do not accept the proposed changes to the scheme as stated at points 3.2 to 3.11 inclusive but accept the other amendments specified at 3.12. This is not recommended as applicants who are on the housing register will continue to wait longer for social housing than those who are being accommodated in temporary accommodation.

3.14 **Option C** – Do not accept any of the proposed changes to the scheme. This is not recommended as applicants who are on the housing register will continue to wait longer for social housing than those who are being accommodated in temporary accommodation and the Allocation Scheme will not be up to date with the amendments required to ensure that it remains relevant and compliant with current legislation.

#### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 It is recommended to accept the proposed amendments to the Housing Allocation Scheme as detailed under 'Option A' at points 3.2 to 3.12 above.
  - 4.2 Accepting the preferred recommendations will assist homeless prevention and will ensure that the scheme continues to remain relevant and up to date with current housing policy.
- 

#### **5. RISK**

- 5.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.
  - 5.2 The proposed change to adding prevention cases to the new Band C and reducing the number of direct lets to applicants in temporary accommodation may result in the length of stay in temporary accommodation increasing. This could result in additional costs to the Council because of the need for more nightly paid temporary accommodation.
  - 5.3 The benefit from this short-term increase would be a reduction in the need for temporary accommodation over the longer term. This will be dependent on applicants understanding that the quickest route to permanent housing is not through obtaining temporary accommodation but rather working with the Housing Service whilst remaining in their current accommodation.
  - 5.4 The inherent risk is that applicants do not alter their approach to seeking a resolution to their housing through the Housing Register bidding system, or that vacancies reduce making it difficult to achieve the greater opportunity to access housing through bidding, and (to a lesser degree) external partners do not promote the new approach to applicants.
  - 5.5 In order to mitigate against these risks, a series of engagement exercises will be undertaken with key partners (such as housing associations and the CAB) to ensure a full understanding of the new approach and the benefits for applicants.
  - 5.6 Regular monitoring of the key indices of success will be undertaken and added to the dashboard on homelessness activity provided to CLT on a monthly basis. This will include the number of lettings undertaken and effect on the use of temporary accommodation.
-

## **6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

- 6.1 The current Housing Allocation scheme was introduced in 2013. The scheme was devised after an extensive consultation process with both internal and external stakeholders.
- 6.2 If the recommended proposals are accepted by the Communities, Housing and Environment committee, the Council is under a statutory duty to provide a copy of the proposed amendments to every housing association with whom the Council has a nomination agreement and to afford them a reasonable period in which to comment on the amendments.
- 

## **7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 7.1 Upon agreement of the proposed recommendations and after consultation with our main housing providers, all relevant stakeholders will be issued with the updated scheme. The updated Housing Allocation scheme will also be published on the Council's website. It is proposed that the consultation process will take 8 weeks.
- 7.2 Once the consultation process has been completed, the revised Allocation Scheme, along with any further amendments, will be considered at the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee in February 2020, which would enable an implementation date of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020.
- 7.3 A communication strategy will be agreed with the Council's Communication Team in order to make applicants aware of the changes and how they will be affected, in time for the changes to be implemented in April 2020.
- 

## **8. REPORT APPENDICES**

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Housing Allocation Scheme – Table of Amendments
  - Appendix B: Housing Allocation Scheme version 2.1
  - Appendix C: Equalities Impact Assessment
- 

## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017  
Housing Act 1996

**Housing Allocation Scheme****Table of Amendments**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Current wording</b>	<b>Amended wording</b>	<b>Reason for amendment</b>
4.1	The Council has given due regard to the Equality Act 2010, particularly Chapter 1 Protected Characteristics and Chapter 2 Prohibited Conduct, in drafting and applying the Allocation Scheme	The Council has given due regard to the Equality Act 2010, particularly;  Part 2 - Chapter 1, Protected Characteristics and Chapter 2 Prohibited Conduct; and  Part 11 - Chapter 1, Public Sector Equality Duty and Chapter 2, Positive Action, in drafting and applying the Allocation Scheme.	Clarification on the particular areas of the Equality Act 2010 that the Scheme has given due regard to.
5.2	In order to request access to personal information, applicants must put the request in writing to the Homechoice and Strategy Manager (see Appendix B).	In order to request access to personal information, applicants can make a Subject Access Request by sending an email to <a href="mailto:dataprotectionofficer@maidstone.gov.uk">dataprotectionofficer@maidstone.gov.uk</a>	Applicants should make a Subject Access Request to access their personal information that we hold.  Updated response timescales and information on GDPR that gives applicants a right to have their data erased.
5.3	The Homechoice Team will collect and prepare the information within 40 days. Files may be edited where	The Homechoice Team will collect and prepare the information within 28 days. Files may be edited where	

	necessary to exclude information restricted by law or evidence provided by a third party, for example a healthcare professional. In the latter case, information can only be released if the professional concerned has given their written consent. Applicants wishing to see information provided by third parties must seek consent from the third party (ies) involved.	necessary to exclude information restricted by law or evidence provided by a third party, for example a healthcare professional. In the latter case, information can only be released if the professional concerned has given their written consent. Applicants wishing to see information provided by third parties must seek consent from the third party(s) involved.	
5.5	n/a	General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) states individuals have the right to have personal data erased. This is also known as the 'right to be forgotten'. The right is not absolute and only applies in certain circumstances.	
8.1	The Council operates a 'closed list' housing register. Unlike previous versions of the Allocation Scheme there are now qualifying entry requirements in order to be accepted onto the register. As the supply of subsidised housing in the borough is limited, the Council will concentrate its resources, which includes its access to subsidised housing (nominations) and staff resources on those applicants most	The Council operates a 'closed list' housing register and there are qualifying entry requirements in order to be accepted onto the register. As the supply of subsidised housing in the borough is limited, the Council will concentrate its resources, which includes its access to subsidised housing (nominations) and staff resources on those applicants most likely to receive an offer of accommodation.	Updated as the Council has operated a 'closed list' register for the past 5 years.

	likely to receive an offer of accommodation.		
9.4	Employment – the applicant must have employment or an offer of employment within Maidstone Borough. The place of work, rather than the business address must be within Maidstone Borough. The employment must be for a minimum of 12 months and be for more than 16 hours a week. Self-employed applicants should provide documentation that confirms they work within the borough. For zero hour contracts see 18.4.1.	Employment – the applicant must have employment or an offer of employment within Maidstone Borough. The place of work, rather than the business address, must be within Maidstone Borough. The employment must be for a minimum of 12 months and be for more than 16 hours a week. Self-employed applicants should provide documentation that confirms they regularly work or operate a business within the borough. For zero hour contracts see 18.4.1.	Clarification that self employed applicants should 'regularly work or operate a business' within the borough.
9.6	n/a	Members of the Armed Forces – Certain members of the Armed Forces and their households will bypass the local connection criteria. For more detailed information as to which members of the armed forces this applies to, please see 18.6.	Certain Members of the Armed Forces do not have to meet the local connection criteria. Now stated in Section 9 – Local Connection.
10.7.1	Housing need will apply to those applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness in 56 days. In order for the applicant to be considered under this	Housing need will apply to those applicants who are owed the S.195(2) Prevention Duty; S.189B(2) Relief Duty or S193(2) main housing duty. The date of the	Updated explanation of who can qualify to join the housing register under the 'Homeless' category and fully incorporating the new housing duties introduced under the



	category the applicant must be actively engaged with the Homelessness Team. The date of the application will be set to the date of the original application for advice and assistance confirmed by a member of the Homelessness Team. Applicants who deliberately and unreasonably refuse to take any step in accordance with the advice given by the Homelessness Team will no longer be considered to have a housing need under this category.	application will be set to the date of the original application for housing assistance confirmed by a member of the Housing Advice Team. Applicants who have their Prevention duty discharged as a result of a deliberately and unreasonable refusal to co-operate will no longer be considered to have a housing need under this category.	Homelessness Reduction Act from April 2018.
10.7.2	Applicants owed a duty during the 'prevention' stage of the HRA will not need to meet the Local Connection criteria as stated in section 9 of this scheme. Once the prevention duty has ended, in order to remain on the register, an applicant will need to demonstrate they have a local connection commensurate with section 9.	Applicants owed the S.195(2) Prevention Duty will not need to meet the Local Connection criteria as stated in section 9 of this scheme. Once the Prevention Duty has ended, in order to remain on the register, an applicant will need to demonstrate they have a local connection commensurate with section 9 and a housing need in accordance with section 10.	
10.7.3	Housing need will apply to homeless applicants owed only advice and assistance duty under S190 (2) and S192 (2) of the Housing Act 1996 Part 7. The Council has chosen to exercise its power to assist intentionally	Housing need will apply to homeless applicants found to be intentionally homeless and owed the advice and assistance duty under S190(2) of the Housing Act 1996. Where an applicant is found to be intentionally homeless, the	

	homeless applicants, and homeless applicants found to be non-priority, as it recognises that homelessness is the most acute form of housing need. Once an applicant has obtained settled accommodation, their housing need will end. The application will be processed under the housing register and must meet the qualifying criteria for local connection. The date of the application will be set as the date of the decision letter sent. A fuller explanation of all homeless categories can be found here ( <a href="http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/contents">http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/contents</a> )	date of their application will be set as the date of the decision letter. Once an applicant has obtained settled accommodation, their housing need will end. The application will be processed under the housing register and must meet the qualifying criteria for local connection. A fuller explanation of all homeless categories can be found here ( <a href="http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/contents">http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/contents</a> )	
10.7.5	Applicants who are of no fixed abode where evidence has been provided may be considered as having a housing need, either because they are overcrowded or because they may be threatened with homelessness.	Applicants who are of no fixed abode, where evidence has been provided, may be considered as having a housing need, either because they are overcrowded or because they may be threatened with homelessness. This will apply to applicants who are found to be not in priority need and whose Relief Duty has ended.	
15.2	Extra bedrooms may be allocated in exceptional circumstances such as where an overnight carer is required. This must be approved by the Senior Homechoice Officer	Extra bedrooms may be allocated in exceptional circumstances such as where an overnight carer is required (see paragraph 18.2) or an extra bedroom is required for a	An extra bedroom should be considered for a disabled child if relevant documentation is provided.

	having considered the evidence provided in accordance with Paragraph 18.2	disabled child who would normally be expected to share a bedroom. This must be approved by a Senior Homechoice Officer.	
17.2	The bands are as follows: A – Community Contribution B – Health Assistance C – Reasonable Preference D - Homeless	The bands are as follows: C – Community Contribution and Homelessness Prevention H – Homeless M – Medical and Health Assistance R – Reasonable Preference	Change of band naming as 'A to D' suggests a priority order.
18.1.1 Now 18.1	This band is for those applicants who have a housing need as per part 2 and in addition entry into this band requires a community contribution which is defined as follows:	This band is for those applicants who have a housing need (see section 10) and in addition entry into this band requires either a community contribution which is defined below, or the applicant is owed a duty under S.195(2) of the Housing Act 1996.	Applicants who are owed a prevention duty are also included in the new Band C in addition to those who meet the community contribution criteria.
18.1.1	n/a	Any applicant to whom a Relief Duty is owed under S.189B; a main housing duty under S.193(2) or S.193C(4) has been accepted under the Housing Act 1996 or; is confirmed as a rough sleeper, will be placed in Band H – Homeless applicants, regardless of if they meet the following community contribution criteria.	Applicants to who either a Relief Duty or the Main Housing Duty is owed will be placed in Band H – Homeless, even if they meet the Community Contribution criteria.

18.1.6	Where an applicant is placed in Band C or Band D, they are eligible to move into Band A once they have demonstrated that they meet the community contribution criteria.	Where an applicant is placed in Band R, they are eligible to move into Band C once they have demonstrated that they meet the community contribution criteria	Updated to reflect the new band names and qualifying criteria.
18.4.1	Employment must be for a minimum of 16 hours per week and with a contract of employment for at least 12 months. Self-employed applicants should provide documentation that confirms they work within the borough. In relation to zero hours contracts if the applicant can provide evidence of continuous employment over a 12 month period this will be sufficient	Employment must be for a minimum of 16 hours per week and with a contract of employment for at least 12 months. Self-employed applicants should provide documentation that confirms they regularly work a minimum of 16 hours per week. In relation to zero hours contracts if the applicant can provide evidence of continuous employment over a 12 month period this will be sufficient.	Clarification that self-employed applicants should provide documentation that confirms they regularly work a minimum of 16 hours per week.
18.7.1	n/a	Applicants who are owed a prevention duty under S.195(2) of the Housing Act 1996. Prevention duty applies when a local authority is satisfied that an applicant is threatened with homelessness and eligible for assistance.	New criteria added for Homeless Prevention Duty applicants to be eligible for the new 'Band C – Community Contribution and Homeless Prevention.'
18.7.2	n/a	If the prevention duty is ended and a relief duty is accepted as the applicant has become homeless, they would be eligible to remain on	Explanation of what happens to an application once the prevention duty is ended.

		the housing register if they meet the local connection criteria as stated in section 9 of this policy. If eligible, from the date that the Relief Duty is accepted, their application would be placed in Band H – Homeless Applicants.	
18.7.3	n/a	If the prevention duty is ended for another reason (e.g. The applicant has refused to cooperate with their caseworker or they have refused an offer of suitable accommodation) they would no longer be eligible to remain on the housing register unless they have evidenced that they meet the two qualifying criteria of housing need and local connection.	
19.1 now 20.1	This band is for people who have a housing need due to significant medical grounds whose current accommodation is not suitable for them due to medical needs, such as a physical disability. Evidence of a medical condition must be supported by documentation from medical professionals or appropriately qualified persons (see section 10.2). It is the Council's intention to match where	This band is for people who have a housing need due to significant medical grounds whose current accommodation is not suitable for them due to medical needs, such as a physical disability, or where another housing need exists but the applicant has a significant medical need and requires an adapted property. Evidence of a medical condition must be supported by documentation from medical professionals or	Amendment in wording to clarify who would be eligible to be placed in 'Band M – Medical and Health Assistance.'

	possible adapted properties to this band.	appropriately qualified persons (see section 10.2). It is the Council's intention to match where possible adapted properties to this band.	
21.1 now 19.1	This band is for those applicants to whom a main housing duty has been accepted under The Housing Act 1996 Part 7 or confirmed as a Rough Sleeper.	This band is for all applicants to whom a Relief Duty is owed under S.189B or a main housing duty under S.193(2) or S.193C(4) has been accepted under The Housing Act 1996. This band is also for applicants found to be intentionally homeless and owed a duty under S.190(2) and applicants found to be not in priority need, or who are rough sleeping. For more information see Section 10.7.	New criteria added for Homeless Prevention Duty applicants to be eligible for the new 'Band H – Homeless.'
21.2 now 19.2	An applicant placed in this band with a main housing duty will have their application date set to the date that a homelessness application with all the relevant supporting documentation was made to the Council.	An applicant placed in this band will have their application date set to the date that a homelessness application with all the relevant supporting documentation was made to the Council, unless they were already accepted on to the Housing Register due to having an alternative housing need or have found to be intentionally homeless, see paragraph 10.7.3.	
21.3 now	Homeless applicants will be expected to actively seek a	Homeless applicants owed the main housing duty under S.193(2)	

19.3	property via the Kent Homechoice Scheme and the Council may place bids on behalf of the applicant. The Council may seek to find and directly nominate to a suitable property in order to discharge its housing duty.	will be expected to actively seek a property via the Kent Homechoice Scheme and the Council may place bids on behalf of the applicant or apply auto-bidding. The Council may seek to find and directly nominate to a suitable property in order to discharge its housing duty.	
22.6	n/a	Additional preference may be given to applicants' who have evidenced that a type of accommodation will have a demonstrable improvement for a child's well-being. Cases will be reviewed on an individual basis at short-listing by a Senior Homechoice Officer.	Paragraph added so that if a type of property matches a dependant child's particular evidenced needs and would improve their well-being, then additional preference may be given.
24.1	The Council will set a quota to allocate the percentage of properties for each band. This quota will be set at the beginning of every financial year for the following year.	The Council will set a quota to allocate the percentage of properties for each band. This quota will be set at the beginning of every financial year for the following year and, if appropriate, following an amendment to the Allocation Scheme.	Amended to include a review of the quota after an amendment to the scheme if appropriate.
26.2	Where a successful nomination is made the housing provider will attempt to contact the applicant. If the applicant does not respond to the housing provider within 7 days	Where a successful nomination is made the housing provider will attempt to contact the applicant. If the applicant does not respond to the housing provider within 7 days	Wording added stating that whilst and applicant is being considered for a property, they will not be verified for another vacancy.

	of the initial contact the nomination will be deemed to be refused and paragraph 29.2 will be applied.	of the initial contact the nomination will be deemed to be refused and paragraph 29.2 will be applied. Whilst being considered for an offer of a property, applicants will not be short-listed for other vacancies.	
27.2	<p>The reasons for determining an applicant ineligible for an offer may include (but are not limited to) the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• previous or current rent arrears, from either private or social tenancies, equivalent to a minimum of 8 weeks rent</li> <li>• arrears with Maidstone Council for a debt in relation to a tenancy, loan or other financial assistance provided by the Housing Service</li> <li>• a history of anti-social behaviour or has wilfully damaged previously rented accommodation</li> </ul>	<p>The reasons for determining an applicant ineligible for an offer may include (but are not limited to) the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• current rent arrears or rent arrears from previous tenancies within a reasonable period (e.g. 6 years) from either private or social tenancies, equivalent to a minimum of 8 weeks rent</li> <li>• arrears with Maidstone Council for a debt in relation to a tenancy, loan or other financial assistance provided by the Housing Service</li> <li>• a history of anti-social behaviour or has wilfully damaged previously rented accommodation</li> </ul>	Arrears from previous tenancy's only to be considered for a reasonable period.



28.1	Will apply in the case of direct offers of accommodation, or where an applicant refuses an offer.	The suitability of an offer of accommodation is considered for all applicants as part of the allocations process. The test of suitability will be determined by the statutory basis of the offer (see paragraph 28.5)	The suitability of an offer is considered for all vacancies, not just for direct offers.
28.5	n/a	For applicants owed a housing duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, in assessing suitability of a final offer of accommodation, consideration will be given to relevant legislation and guidance. Applicants will have the right to request a review of the suitability of any offer of accommodation offered to discharge a duty under sections 189B to 193C and 195. Applicants should be advised of their right to request a review having accepted an offer, as this secures the accommodation whilst the review is considered.	Additional paragraph added for considering suitability of offers for applicants owed a housing duty.
29.4	n/a	For applicants owed a housing duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, a Senior Officer within the Housing Advice Team will make a decision on whether the final offer of accommodation was suitable, considering any additional information provided by the	Additional paragraph added for considering refusals of offers for applicants owed a housing duty.

		applicant and whether, as a result of a refusal of the final offer, the housing duty owed to the applicant will be discharged. Applicants should be advised of their right to request a review having accepted an offer, as this secures the accommodation whilst the review is considered.	
30.1	n/a	The Council recognises that because of the particular circumstances of the Gypsy and Traveller community it may not be appropriate to follow normal housing allocation policy.	New section added stating that Gypsy and Traveller applications and allocations need to be considered outside of the Allocation Scheme.
30.2	n/a	Applicants can register their interest in vacant site plots by completing a Housing Register application form and indicating that they require a plot on a site.	
30.3	n/a	Plots will be allocated, where available, to members of the Gypsy and Traveller community who can provide evidence that they live in or regularly frequent Maidstone borough. If they live in the Borough, evidence should be provided as stated in Appendix A of this scheme.	

30.4	n/a	Applicants for vacancies will be considered in the order of when their completed application form and all required supporting information was received by the Council.	
31.1 now 32.1	The housing of high risk offenders will be carried out as part of a multi-agency arrangement with the Police, Probation, Social Services and other appropriate agencies. An area or type of property acceptable to the Council will be agreed in partnership with the agencies involved. High risk offenders will be offered limited choice through Kent Homechoice. Where there are urgent issues, the Homechoice and Strategy Manager may consider a direct offer, taking into account all relevant matters concerning the applicant.	The housing of high risk offenders will be carried out as part of a multi-agency arrangement with the Police, National Probation Service, Social Services and other appropriate agencies and an Accommodation Specific Housing Risk Assessment will need to be completed by the National Probation Service.	An Accommodation Specific Housing Risk Assessment will need to be completed by the National Probation Service.
32.2	See above	An area or type of property acceptable to the Council will be agreed in partnership with the agencies involved. High risk offenders will be offered limited choice through Kent Homechoice. Where there are urgent issues, the Homechoice and Strategy Manager may consider a direct offer, taking	

		into account all relevant matters concerning the applicant.	
41.1	n/a	Maidstone Borough Council has signed up to the Kent and Medway Reciprocal Scheme. This is a voluntary scheme between the 13 Kent and Medway authorities to support the duty to co-operate under S.213 of the Housing Act 1996. The scheme's aim is to prevent households from becoming homeless as a result of domestic abuse or violence/ serious harassment from outside the home.	Section added for the Kent and Medway reciprocal scheme.
41.2	n/a	Where the Council has agreed to assist another Local Authority under this scheme, the applicant will assess the applicant in accordance with this Scheme, however, the local connection criteria will not apply.	

# Allocation Scheme

Version 2.1  
January 2020

## Contents

<b>Aims and Priorities .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Part 1 – Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1 Lettings not covered by the policy.....	4
2 The Legal Framework .....	4
3 Eligibility for Allocation of Housing.....	5
4 Equality and Diversity .....	5
5 Access to Personal Information .....	6
6 Review of the Scheme .....	6
7 Review of decisions requested by applicants.....	7
<b>Part 2 – The Housing Register .....</b>	<b>7</b>
8 Entry on to the Register.....	7
9 Local Connection .....	8
10 Housing Need .....	9
11 Financial Circumstances .....	13
<b>Part 3 – Applying to join the Housing Register .....</b>	<b>14</b>
12 Who can be considered part of an application?.....	14
13 Pregnancy .....	14
14 Area Preferences .....	14
15 Bedroom Allocation .....	15
16 Being on the Register.....	15
<b>Part 4 – Housing Register bands.....</b>	<b>16</b>
17 Bands .....	16
18 Band C - Community Contribution and Homelessness Prevention .....	16
19 Band H – Homeless Applicants .....	19
20 Band M – Medical and Health Assistance.....	19
21 Band R – Reasonable Preference (Unsuitable Housing) .....	19
<b>Part 5 – Allocations.....</b>	<b>20</b>
22 The Bidding Process.....	20
23 Adverts.....	21
24 The Quota .....	21

25	Direct Allocations.....	21
26	Nominations .....	22
27	Ineligibility for an offer .....	22
28	Suitability .....	23
29	Refusals.....	24
<b>Part 6 – Miscellaneous.....</b>		<b>24</b>
30	Gypsy and Traveller Sites.....	24
31	Applicants in Prison .....	25
32	High Risk Offenders .....	25
33	National Witness Mobility Scheme (NWMS) .....	25
34	Other Accommodation .....	26
35	Selection criteria and priorities for supported housing.....	26
36	Processing applications from older people .....	27
37	Adapted Properties.....	27
38	Local Lettings Policies .....	28
39	Decants (urgently moving existing housing association tenants).....	28
40	Management Moves.....	29
41	Reciprocals.....	29
42	Applications from Maidstone Borough Council Employees and Elected members.....	29
43	Glossary .....	30
44	Appendix A.....	32
45	Appendix B – Reviews.....	34

## **Aims and Priorities**

Maidstone Borough Council's Allocation Scheme has been designed to ensure that access to subsidised housing supports the needs of residents, the corporate aims of the Council, as well as reflect current legislation. The Council's vision is for our residents to live in decent homes, enjoy good health and well-being and for a pleasant environment with a successful economy. There is an extremely limited supply of subsidised housing within Maidstone and this scheme is designed to work with our housing providers to make best use of the stock available and promote Maidstone as an attractive place to live.

Maidstone Borough Council's Allocation Scheme is designed to treat all applicants for subsidised housing in a fair and equitable manner. The Allocation Scheme is designed to offer applicants some choice in their accommodation and ability to express preference on their accommodation type and location. This individual choice and preference must be balanced with the needs of all applicants and the need for the Council to offer best value through its housing services. Applicants should be aware that the housing stock in Maidstone is limited and that they may be moved to a more suitable property faster if they are more flexible in the type or location of the property that they require. The Council awards additional priority to applicants in work or who assist their local community in other ways, such as serving in the Armed Forces or undertaking voluntary work. The scheme is also designed to support the Council's objectives of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024 and of the Strategic Plan 2019-2045 in preventing both homelessness and rough sleeping.



## Part 1 – Introduction

### 1 Lettings not covered by the policy

- 1.1 The following are examples of lettings not covered by, or specifically excluded from the Allocation Scheme, under the provision of the Housing Act 1996:
- Offers of non-secure tenancies to homeless households pursuant to any duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996;
  - The conversion of introductory tenancies into secure tenancies or their Housing Association equivalent;
  - Offers of tied accommodation made to Council employees;
  - Offers or nominations of accommodation made at the Council's own instigation for example offers to tenants being moved from their homes to allow major works to take place;
  - Transfer of tenancies made by a Court Order under the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 or other family legislation;
  - Granting or disposal of tenancies by order of a Court.

### 2 The Legal Framework

- 2.1 Maidstone Borough Council keeps a Housing Register of people who want to be considered for subsidised housing. The Council's Allocation Scheme operates in accordance with the statutory provisions contained in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).
- 2.2 The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) requires all Local Authorities to introduce a lettings scheme to reflect the priorities defined by the Act, and to give reasonable preference to:
- People who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Act (amended 2002));
  - People who are owed duties by any Local Authority under Section 190(2), 193(2), 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under section 192(3), as repealed by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 but not amended within the Housing Act 1996;
  - People occupying unsanitary housing or who are overcrowded or living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
  - People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others);
  - People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds including grounds relating to disability.

### **3 Eligibility for Allocation of Housing**

- 3.1 Certain persons subject to immigration control are not eligible for the allocation of housing under s160ZA (1) (a), (3) and (5) under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). This includes:
- Over-stayers and visitors to the country
  - Illegal entrants
  - Asylum Seekers
  - People in the country on condition that they have no recourse to public funds
  - "Persons from abroad" who fail the habitual residence test
  - "Persons from abroad" who are in breach of the European Community Right of Residence directive
  - "Persons from abroad" who have been the subject of a sponsorship agreement for less than 5 years and whose sponsors are still alive.
- 3.2 The above list provides examples. It should be noted that the statutory framework for eligibility is subject to alteration by the Secretary of State.
- 3.3 An applicant is able to request a review of the Council's decision by writing to the Senior Homechoice Officer (see Appendix B).

### **4 Equality and Diversity**

- 4.1 The Council has given due regard to the Equality Act 2010, particularly;
- Part 2 - Chapter 1, Protected Characteristics and Chapter 2 Prohibited Conduct; and
  - Part 11 - Chapter 1, Public Sector Equality Duty and Chapter 2, Positive Action, in drafting and applying the Allocation Scheme.
- 4.2 The Council operates an equality and diversity policy and is committed to delivering a fair and equitable service that is appropriate and accessible to all sections of the local community, as well as working to eliminate discrimination on any grounds.
- 4.3 The implementation of a clear and consistent Allocation Scheme goes hand in hand with careful equalities monitoring. As part of the housing register application, we ask questions around ethnicity, disability, sexuality, religious beliefs, age, employment and support needs. The data provided by the applicant will help us to monitor that the scheme is operated in a fair and non – discriminatory manner as well as for service improvements.
- 4.4 It is important that the Allocation Scheme is understood by all current and prospective applicants. Straight forward information through leaflets are available in a variety of formats and where appropriate, interpreters are used for applicants seeking advice and assistance.

## **5 Access to Personal Information**

- 5.1 An applicant has the right to see and to confirm the accuracy of information about them which is held by the Council.
- 5.2 In order to request access to personal information, applicants can make a Subject Access Request by sending an email to [dataprotectionofficer@maidstone.gov.uk](mailto:dataprotectionofficer@maidstone.gov.uk)
- 5.3 The Homechoice Team will collect and prepare the information within 28 days. Files may be edited where necessary to exclude information restricted by law or evidence provided by a third party, for example a healthcare professional. In the latter case, information can only be released if the professional concerned has given their written consent. Applicants wishing to see information provided by third parties must seek consent from the third party(s) involved.
- 5.4 If the applicant considers the personal information they have received is inaccurate, they may request that it is amended or removed from their records. If the Homechoice and Strategy Manager agrees the information is incorrect, appropriate action will be taken to amend the records.
- 5.5 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) states individuals have the right to have personal data erased. This is also known as the 'right to be forgotten'. The right is not absolute and only applies in certain circumstances.
- 5.6 Disclosure of information may be denied by the Council in any of the following circumstances:
- The information could prejudice criminal proceedings;
  - Legal professional privilege could be claimed;
  - A care professional is of the opinion that disclosure could result in a risk of serious harm to the applicant or others as a result of disclosure.
- 5.7 The Council will not pass information to a third party without an applicant's consent unless they have a legal right to obtain it.

## **6 Review of the Scheme**

- 6.1 To ensure the continued effectiveness of the policy, certain improvements may need to be made to ensure the policy is kept up to date. Minor amendments can be made once approved by the appropriate Director. The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee will be advised of the change with the opportunity to provide comments within one calendar month before the amendments are incorporated.

## **7 Review of decisions requested by applicants**

- 7.1 Applicants have a statutory right to request a review of a decision relating to their application, (Housing Act 1996 as amended). Where an applicant wants to introduce a medical issue not previously considered under the original application the applicant must follow the procedure set out in paragraph 10.2 Medical Grounds. In addition, Appendix B lists those subjects on which applicants can request a review, together with the timescale for requesting a review and receiving a response. All requests for a review must be made in writing (this can be in the form of an email).

## **Part 2 – The Housing Register**

### **8 Entry on to the Register**

- 8.1 The Council operates a 'closed list' housing register and there are qualifying entry requirements in order to be accepted onto the register. As the supply of subsidised housing in the borough is limited, the Council will concentrate its resources, which includes its access to subsidised housing (nominations) and staff resources on those applicants most likely to receive an offer of accommodation.
- 8.2 In order to be accepted onto the register all applicants must meet the two qualifying criteria; these are local connection (see Section 9) and housing need (see Section 10). Applicants will not be accepted on to the housing register until all the requested information has been provided. Incomplete new applications will not be processed and the applicant will be contacted to provide the required information. The applicant will be given 28 days to provide all their relevant information; otherwise the application will be declined. Applicants owed a homelessness duty may be given a further 28 days to provide all their relevant information at the discretion of the applicant's caseworker. A list of relevant documents is contained in Appendix A.
- 8.3 Where an application is accepted onto the housing register the applicant's priority date will be set as the date when a valid application was received, i.e. the date that the completed application and all required supporting information was received by the Council.
- 8.4 Applications will not normally be accepted from persons under 18 years of age, one exception are people who are owed duties by any Local Authority under Section 190(2), 193(2), 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under section 192(3) duty, as repealed by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 but not amended within the Housing Act 1996.
- 8.5 Local Connection will not be deemed to be an overriding factor when it is necessary for an applicant to leave an area, such as in cases of domestic abuse.

## 9 Local Connection

- 9.1 In order to access the housing register, applicants need to fulfil at least one of the following local connection criteria.
- 9.2 Resident – the applicant has been residing within Maidstone Borough for a continuous period of 2 years immediately prior to the application. The Council may confirm these details with other information held internally by the Council e.g. Council Tax and Housing Benefit records.
- 9.3 Family - the applicant must have immediate family that has been residing within Maidstone Borough for a continuous period of 5 years immediately prior to the application. The Council may confirm these details with other data held internally.
- 9.4 Employment – the applicant must have employment or an offer of employment within Maidstone Borough. The place of work, rather than the business address, must be within Maidstone Borough. The employment must be for a minimum of 12 months and be for more than 16 hours a week. Self-employed applicants should provide documentation that confirms they regularly work or operate a business within the borough. For zero hour contracts see 18.4.1.
- 9.5 Returning Resident – the applicant must have been residing in the borough for a continuous period of at least 2 of the last 5 years but does not currently live within Maidstone Borough. The only exception to this are applicants being released from prison where their sentence exceeds 5 years. The Senior Homechoice Officer may accept an applicant as being a returning resident in exceptional circumstances.
- 9.6 Members of the Armed Forces – Certain members of the Armed Forces and their households will bypass the local connection criteria. For more detailed information as to which members of the armed forces this applies to, please see 18.6.
- 9.7 In cases where a duty is owed in accordance with the Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 confirmed by a decision letter (in accordance with section 184) the Local Connection requirements will be those contained within the relevant legislation and Code of Guidance, which takes precedence over those contained within this document. A copy of the relevant Code can be viewed at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>
- 9.8 Persons placed in Maidstone Borough by another local housing authority under the provision of the homelessness legislation will not become eligible for an offer of accommodation until the period of 5 years has expired from the date of their placement and would not amount to a local connection for other family members under paragraph 9.3. When a Relief Duty may be owed under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, the Homechoice and Strategy Manager may use discretion for the purpose of enabling a referral to another local authority.

- 9.9 In exceptional circumstances the matter will be considered as part of the review process and discretion can be applied by the Head of Housing and Community Services, if an applicant is able to demonstrate a local connection that does not readily match the local connection criteria stated above. For example, applicants may have a need for support, special school placements or medical treatment which cannot be met in any other reasonable location. Applicants may also have felt the need to leave an area where they have a local connection. This is often supported by the police or another external agency. If the Head of Housing and Community Services is satisfied with the evidence provided in these cases, the applicant may be accepted onto the housing register.
- 9.10 Right to Move
- 9.10.1 The Council supports the Government's guidance on the Right to Move that permits Armed Forces personnel access to the housing register.
- 9.10.2 The Allocation Scheme supports increasing mobility for social tenants to enable them to meet their employment aspirations and to support them into work. Where a social housing tenant needs to move to Maidstone to take up a job or apprenticeship offer or live closer to work, they must be able to demonstrate to the Council's satisfaction that the work or job offer is genuine and that they need, rather than wish to move, and that if they were unable to do so, it would cause them hardship. The Council will consider and take into account the factors recommended by the Secretary of State in determining whether a tenant needs to move to be closer to work or take up a job/apprenticeship offer. These include:
- The distance and/or time taken to travel between work and home.
  - The availability and affordability of transport, taking into account level of earnings.
  - The nature of the work and whether similar opportunities are available closer to home.
  - Other personal factors, such as medical conditions and child care, which would be affected if the tenant could not move.
  - The length of the work contract.
  - Whether failure to move would result in the loss of an opportunity to improve employment circumstances or prospects, for example, by taking up a better job, a promotion, or an apprenticeship
- 9.10.3 The Council will seek appropriate documentary evidence and may also contact the employer to verify the position (see Appendix A).
- 9.11 An applicant is able to request a review of the Council's decision not to agree local connection by writing to the Senior Homechoice Officer (see Appendix B).

## **10 Housing Need**

- 10.1 Applicants must be in housing need to access the register and must qualify for one of the reasonable preference criteria as set out in S166A(3) of the Housing Act 1996. Further clarification is provided below.

## 10.2 Medical

- 10.2.1 To qualify on medical grounds, applicants must be able to demonstrate that their current accommodation is unsuitable for their households' needs due to a medical condition. This includes people who have a physical disability, mobility needs, mental illness or learning disabilities.
- 10.2.2 Applicants must be able to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Homechoice Officer that their current accommodation is not suitable. Medical conditions include physical disabilities, mobility needs, mental illness and learning disabilities and documentation to support the application must be provided from an NHS medical professional, or an equivalent external agency.
- 10.2.3 If the Homechoice Officer is unable to determine if an applicant qualifies, all details will be sent to an independent medical advisor who will assess the application. The independent medical advisor's assessment will form part of the information to determine whether an applicant qualifies on medical grounds.
- 10.2.4 All applicants are entitled to one medical assessment for each member of the household that will be moving with them at no cost. Any further medical assessments must be paid for in full by the applicant unless there has been a significant change in the medical condition of an applicant or someone in the household.
- 10.2.5 The fee for a medical assessment will be £75. This will be reviewed annually by the Homechoice and Strategy Manager.
- 10.2.6 Following an initial application for a medical assessment, a request must be made in writing to the Senior Homechoice Officer which must include all documentation that an applicant wants to be sent for medical assessment. The Homechoice and Strategy Manager will then review whether a free medical assessment is appropriate.

## 10.3 Welfare

- 10.3.1 A move on welfare grounds may encompass a wide range of individual circumstances and will include, but not be limited to:
- Someone moving on from care.
  - Someone moving on from a drug or alcohol recovery programme.
  - Someone who wants to live independently but requires some additional support, such as someone with learning disabilities.
  - Someone who provides or receives care or support.
  - Someone who needs to leave their current accommodation due to being a victim of crime or intimidation or domestic abuse
- 10.3.2 A move on welfare grounds should be accompanied by supporting evidence from an appropriately qualified professional connected with the applicant. The Homechoice Officer will assess whether an applicant qualifies in this category.



#### 10.4 Hazardous Properties

10.4.1 A property will be defined as hazardous by reference to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) prescribed within The Housing Act 2004 Part 1 (or any replacement standard).

10.4.2 A property will be considered as being hazardous where an HHSRS assessment identifies:

- i) one or more Category 1 hazards, and where;
- ii) a member of the applicant's household falls within the vulnerable age group for the hazard/s (as detailed in the relevant guidance), and;
- ii) the hazard/s cannot be resolved within a period of 6 months.

10.4.3 Properties, located in Maidstone, assessed as containing Category 1 hazards that can be resolved within a period of 6 months will be subject to enforcement action to remove the hazard. The owner of the property will be responsible for all costs incurred in the resolution of the problem, including any requirement for temporary accommodation that may result due to the hazard.

#### 10.5 Overcrowding & Under Occupancy

10.5.1 A household will be deemed to be overcrowded if, when the bedroom standard in section 15 is applied, the household is lacking one or more bedrooms and their home is not considered suitable for their needs. In larger properties, where there are additional rooms that would not be typically used as bedrooms, any additional rooms should be counted as providing bed spaces. This is with the exception of a kitchen/dining/living area.

10.5.2 Households that have moved to a property and made themselves overcrowded will not be eligible under this category.

10.5.3 Whilst under occupying is not necessarily a housing need it is in the interest of applicants and landlords that best use is made of existing accommodation. A household will be deemed to be under-occupying if they are an existing social housing tenant and when the bedroom standard in Section 15 is applied, the household exceeds its need by one or more bedrooms.

10.5.4 In determining whether a property is overcrowded or under-occupied the Homechoice Officer will apply an objective test based on the size and type of property and not on how the property is being used by the occupants.

10.5.5 The Homechoice and Strategy Manager has the discretion to consider exceptional cases where the bedroom criteria does not readily match the household type (e.g. bed space criteria.)



## 10.6 Hardship

- 10.6.1 Households will be deemed to be in hardship if they need to move to alleviate or prevent hardship. This includes, but is not limited to, those who need to move to give or receive care, and those who need to move to take up an employment, education or training opportunity.
- 10.6.2 Evidence of this must be provided and the Homechoice Officer will assess whether an applicant qualifies on the basis of hardship.
- 10.6.3 Applicants who are applying due to financial hardship will need to provide a completed income and expenditure form for the household, in order for an assessment to be completed. A form to assist the applicant can be sent upon request.

## 10.7 Homeless

- 10.7.1 Housing need will apply to those applicants who are owed the S.195(2) Prevention Duty; S.189B(2) Relief Duty or S193(2) main housing duty. The date of the application will be set to the date of the original application for housing assistance confirmed by a member of the Housing Advice Team. Applicants who have their Prevention duty discharged as a result of a deliberately and unreasonable refusal to co-operate will no longer be considered to have a housing need under this category.
- 10.7.2 Applicants owed the S.195(2) Prevention Duty will not need to meet the Local Connection criteria as stated in section 9 of this scheme. Once the Prevention Duty has ended, in order to remain on the register, an applicant will need to demonstrate they have a local connection commensurate with section 9 and a housing need in accordance with section 10.
- 10.7.3 Housing need will apply to homeless applicants found to be intentionally homeless and owed the advice and assistance duty under S190(2) of the Housing Act 1996. Where an applicant is found to be intentionally homeless, the date of their application will be set as the date of the decision letter. Once an applicant has obtained settled accommodation, their housing need will end. The application will be processed under the housing register and must meet the qualifying criteria for local connection. A fuller explanation of all homeless categories can be found here (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/contents>)
- 10.7.4 Where an applicant who is rough sleeping has their situation confirmed by a partner agency e.g. Maidstone Day Centre or any other registered agency working within the Borough for this client group, then the applicant will be assessed as having a housing need.
- 10.7.5 Applicants who are of no fixed abode, where evidence has been provided, may be considered as having a housing need, either because they are overcrowded or because they may be threatened with homelessness. This will apply to applicants who are found to be not in priority need and whose Relief Duty has ended.

- 10.8 If an applicant does not meet any of the housing need criteria they will not normally be allowed to have access to the housing register and will be unable to bid on properties. An applicant is able to request a review of the Council's decision to refuse an application on housing need by writing to the Council (see Appendix B).
- 10.9 In exceptional circumstances, the Head of Housing and Communities has the discretion to accept an application that does not meet any of the above housing need criteria.

## **11 Financial Circumstances**

- 11.1 In order to access the Housing Register at the point of application, and upon request e.g. at the point of an offer of accommodation, applicants must provide details of all bank accounts, savings, investments and capital that belong to any member of their household.
- 11.2 An applicant's financial circumstances will be assessed at the time of their application and any material change in circumstances should be reported as a change of circumstances as per Section 16.
- 11.3 As subsidised housing is a limited resource, those who have the financial means to rent privately or to buy a property are unlikely to meet the qualifying criteria to enter the register unless a main housing duty has been accepted for them.
- 11.4 For the purpose of determining affordability for certain developments in Parish areas that are subject to specific planning requirements e.g. rural exception sites (see paragraph 38.5) the test applied is whether the applicant can afford the cost of housing in the Parish where the rural exception site has been delivered as opposed to the cost of their current accommodation where this is away from the Parish area.
- 11.5 The Council considers that a total of £16,000 in capital, investments and savings constitutes sufficient financial means to rent privately or buy a property. This includes equity from a property. The Council will only consider priority payments, such as rent and council tax, when taking debts into account.
- 11.6 A household's gross income of £40,000 will also constitute sufficient financial means. This figure includes any benefits received.
- 11.7 The Council will take into consideration any disposal of funds within 2 years of the application to assess financial circumstances. Where an applicant cannot demonstrate the appropriate disposal of funds, the Council may draw an inference as to how the funds have been used.
- 11.8 An applicant is able to request a review of the Council's decision to refuse an application on financial circumstances by writing to the Senior Homechoice Officer (see Appendix B).

## Part 3 – Applying to join the Housing Register

### 12 Who can be considered part of an application?

12.1 The only persons who will be considered as part of an applicant's household will be:

- Partner
- Children
- Relatives
- Carers
- Any member of the household who can reasonably be considered residing with the applicant at the time of initial application

#### 12.2 Children

12.2.1 Children are defined as members of the household who are under 18 years of age and the applicant must have legal responsibility for the children.

12.2.2 The test of normal residence as a member of the family will require residence as opposed to "staying" or "staying access" even in cases of joint custody or joint residence or similar orders. The Council in applying the test will consider whether there is a sufficient degree of permanence or regularity to constitute normal residence as a member of the household. Account may be taken of whether the child is dependent upon the applicant. The Council may also take into account the supply and demand for accommodation in the Maidstone Borough and any under-occupation that may result where a child spends part of the week with one parent and part of the week with another parent.

### 13 Pregnancy

13.1 Pregnancy must be reported to the Council as a change of circumstances and relevant proof of pregnancy must be supplied.

13.2 Upon entering the last trimester (usually the last 12 – 14 weeks) of a pregnancy, the pregnancy will be considered as an additional child for the purpose of assessing the bedroom needs of an applicant.

### 14 Area Preferences

14.1 Applicants should be aware that whilst their area preference will be respected, Maidstone has a limited supply of subsidised housing. In order to make best use of this limited resource, and for an applicant to maximise their chances of being housed, applicants should bid on all properties that are suitable regardless of location.

- 14.2 The Kent Homechoice website will provide details of bidding activity including details of successful bids. Information is provided through Kent Homechoice that will enable the applicant to make an assessment of how long it will take to be housed. Some areas are more popular than others and some property types attract more bids than others. As applicants can identify areas of the Borough where many or few vacancies of suitably sized accommodation may become available, they can make an assessment as to the likelihood of a property becoming available in that area.

## **15 Bedroom Allocation**

- 15.1 Household composition determines the number of bedrooms in a home that an applicant can be awarded. The Council will use the bedroom standard recommended by the Secretary of State which allocates a separate bedroom to each:

- Married or co-habiting couple
- Person aged 16 years or over
- Two children of the same sex up to the age of 16
- Two children aged under 10 years regardless of sex

- 15.2 Extra bedrooms may be allocated in exceptional circumstances such as where an overnight carer is required (see paragraph 18.2) or an extra bedroom is required for a disabled child who would normally be expected to share a bedroom. This must be approved by a Senior Homechoice Officer.

- 15.3 An applicant is able to request a review of the Council's decision in respect of bedroom allocation by writing to the Homechoice and Strategy Manager (see Appendix B).

## **16 Being on the Register**

- 16.1 Applicants must inform the Housing Service in writing or by email of any changes to their circumstances such as, but not limited to, change of address or composition of household within 30 days of the change occurring. This may result in a change to the band that the applicant has been placed in. This may affect an offer of accommodation if the information provided by the applicant is out of date and could result in the withdrawal of an offer.

- 16.2 Applicants are entitled to remain on the register until their housing need has been resolved unless they are removed by the Council, however, all applicants must be active on the register and bidding for properties whenever possible and appropriate.

- 16.3 Applicants are required to renew their housing register application every 12 months. The Council will contact applicants on an annual basis, reminding them of the requirement to renew, in order to remain on the Housing Register.

- 16.4 If an applicant fails to respond within 28 days of being asked to renew their application their application will be removed. When a new housing register application is submitted after one has been removed, the applicant will be treated as a new case. This means the applicants' priority date will be set at the date of the new valid application.
- 16.5 An applicant is able to request a review of the Council's decision to cancel an application by writing to the Senior Homechoice Officer (see Appendix B).

## Part 4 – Housing Register bands

### 17 Bands

- 17.1 The Council operates a system known as banding to measure an applicant's housing need. When an application is received, it is assessed and placed into one of four bands depending on the housing needs of the applicant. These bands reflect the reasonable preference criteria set out in the relevant legislation.
- 17.2 The bands are as follows:
- C – Community Contribution and Homelessness Prevention
  - H – Homeless
  - M – Medical and Health Assistance
  - R – Reasonable Preference
- 17.3 In order to achieve the aims and priorities (Page 3) a greater number of properties per applicant will go to Band C; the intention being to encourage applicants into this band. Applicants in Band M are likely to need housing based on a medical requirement. The Council will work with its housing providers to match adapted properties to applicants with a specific need for this type of housing.

### 18 Band C - Community Contribution and Homelessness Prevention

- 18.1 This band is for those applicants who have a housing need (see section 10) and in addition entry into this band requires either a community contribution which is defined below, or the applicant is owed a duty under S.195(2) of the Housing Act 1996.
- 18.1.1 Any applicant to whom a Relief Duty is owed under S.189B; a main housing duty under S.193(2) or S.193C(4) has been accepted under the Housing Act 1996 or; is confirmed as a rough sleeper, will be placed in Band H – Homeless applicants, regardless of if they meet the following community contribution criteria.

- 18.1.2 Community contribution is defined by, but not limited to, the following criteria:
- Persons who are members of the Armed Forces or their families (see paragraph 18.6)
  - Persons undertaking voluntary work
  - Persons in employment
  - Persons who are foster carers or adopters (see paragraph 18.5)
  - Persons providing care (see paragraph 18.2)
- 18.1.3 Community contribution must be supported by evidence to demonstrate the persons within the application fit into one of the criteria set out in the following paragraphs.
- 18.1.4 Applicants must fulfil the community contribution requirements as stated in 18.1.2 at the point of application in order to enter this band.
- 18.1.5 Applicants must continue to fulfil the community contribution criteria whilst they are on the register and be able to prove that they fulfil the criteria when an offer of accommodation is made.
- 18.1.6 Where an applicant is placed in Band R, they are eligible to move into Band C once they have demonstrated that they meet the community contribution criteria.
- 18.1.7 If an applicant believes that they fulfil the community contribution test in another way they should provide as many details and evidence of their contribution as they can to the Senior Homechoice Officer who will decide if they qualify.
- 18.1.8 An applicant is able to request a review of the Council's decision that the community contribution criteria are not met by writing to the Senior Homechoice Officer (see Appendix B).
- 18.2 Persons Acting as Carers
- 18.2.1 Any applicant in receipt of the Carer's Allowance will qualify as a carer.
- 18.3 Persons Undertaking Voluntary Work
- 18.3.1 The Council believes that voluntary work provides a fundamental role in providing a community contribution and the allocation of housing reflects the importance of this.
- 18.3.2 An applicant will qualify for this if they volunteer for a not for profit group or organisation that works in or is based within the borough.
- 18.3.3 Applicants must be able to prove that they volunteer for a minimum of 10 hours a week and have done so on a consistent basis for at least 6 months. A letter or email from an employee of the group/organisation to confirm this is required.

#### 18.4 Persons in Employment

- 18.4.1 Employment must be for a minimum of 16 hours per week and with a contract of employment for at least 12 months. Self-employed applicants should provide documentation that confirms they regularly work a minimum of 16 hours per week. In relation to zero hours contracts if the applicant can provide evidence of continuous employment over a 12 month period this will be sufficient.

#### 18.5 Persons who are Foster Carers or Adopters

- 18.5.1 KCC approved adopters and foster carers will fulfil the community contribution qualification. Those who are applying to be a foster carer or adopter will not qualify for community contribution until they have been approved by KCC and provided documentation confirming this.
- 18.5.2 As foster children are not included in bedroom allocation, an applicant who is an approved foster carer can request an additional bedroom to allow them to continue fostering.
- 18.5.3 When an applicant is an approved adopter, they are entitled to request an additional bedroom so as not to prevent them adopting a child.

#### 18.6 Persons who are Members of the Armed Forces or their Families

- 18.6.1 Members of the Armed Forces, and their families, often struggle to fulfil local connection requirements due to having to move from base to base. As such, any household that fulfils the following criteria will bypass the local connection and housing need criteria and will automatically have a community contribution.

The criteria are:

- Current member of the Armed Forces
  - Served in the Armed Forces within the last 5 years (except where the applicant has been dishonourably discharged).
  - Bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving Services Family Accommodation and where the death of the spouse was wholly or partially attributable to their service.
  - Members of the Reserve Forces who need to move on medical or welfare grounds as a result of their service.
- 18.6.2 Members of the Reserve Forces qualify for community contribution but must fulfil the local connection criteria.
- #### 18.7 Homeless Prevention
- 18.7.1 Applicants who are owed a prevention duty under S.195(2) of the Housing Act 1996. Prevention duty applies when a local authority is satisfied that an applicant is threatened with homelessness and eligible for assistance.



- 18.7.2 If the prevention duty is ended and a relief duty is accepted as the applicant has become homeless, they would be eligible to remain on the housing register if they meet the local connection criteria as stated in section 9 of this policy. If eligible, from the date that the Relief Duty is accepted, their application would be placed in Band H – Homeless Applicants.
- 18.7.3 If the prevention duty is ended for another reason (e.g. The applicant has refused to cooperate with their caseworker or they have refused an offer of suitable accommodation) they would no longer be eligible to remain on the housing register unless they have evidenced that they meet the two qualifying criteria of housing need and local connection.

## **19 Band H – Homeless Applicants**

- 19.1 This band is for all applicants to whom a Relief Duty is owed under S.189B or a main housing duty under S.193(2) or S.193C(4) has been accepted under The Housing Act 1996. This band is also for applicants found to be intentionally homeless and owed a duty under S.190(2) and applicants found to be not in priority need, or who are rough sleeping. For more information see Section 10.7.
- 19.2 An applicant placed in this band will have their application date set to the date that a homelessness application with all the relevant supporting documentation was made to the Council, unless they were already accepted on to the Housing Register due to having an alternative housing need or have found to be intentionally homeless, see paragraph 10.7.3.
- 19.3 Homeless applicants owed the main housing duty under S.193(2) will be expected to actively seek a property via the Kent Homechoice Scheme and the Council may place bids on behalf of the applicant or apply auto-bidding. The Council may seek to find and directly nominate to a suitable property in order to discharge its housing duty.

## **20 Band M – Medical and Health Assistance**

- 20.1 This band is for people who have a housing need due to significant medical grounds whose current accommodation is not suitable for them due to medical needs, such as a physical disability, or where another housing need exists but the applicant has a significant medical need and requires an adapted property. Evidence of a medical condition must be supported by documentation from medical professionals or appropriately qualified persons (see section 10.2). It is the Council's intention to match where possible adapted properties to this band.

## **21 Band R – Reasonable Preference (Unsuitable Housing)**

- 21.1 This band is for those applicants who have a housing need due to unsatisfactory housing conditions, such as statutory overcrowding or insanitary or hazardous properties, those with a medical need not requiring specific adaptations, or those that need to move to prevent or alleviate hardship or on the grounds of welfare. Other applicants who do not meet the requirements of Band C, Band H, or Band M will join this band if they qualify to join the housing register.



## Part 5 – Allocations

### 22 The Bidding Process

- 22.1 Kent Homechoice (Choice Based Letting Scheme) is the mechanism the Council uses to enable applicants to bid on housing within the borough. Kent Homechoice is a web based scheme on which landlords advertise vacant properties. Kent Homechoice is a partnership between the 13 Local Housing Authorities in Kent and over 30 housing association landlords. Upon acceptance to the register, applicants will be sent details of their application number, which band they have been placed in, and details of the user guide for the website.
- 22.2 Applicants should familiarise themselves with the website as soon as they are able to.
- 22.3 Properties are advertised daily and all applicants are allowed to bid on up to three adverts while the bidding is open. Applicants should place bids on as many properties as they are able to that meet their requirements.
- 22.4 Applicants will be expected to actively seek a property via the Kent Homechoice Scheme. If an applicant is not placing regular bids, the Council may suspend their application. The applicant will be contacted within 7 days and asked to explain their reason for not bidding. If the applicant fails to respond with a valid reason within 14 days their application will be removed. If the reason for non-bidding relates to their inability to use the Kent Homechoice system the Council will provide assistance to the applicant and the application can be reinstated by the Senior Homechoice Officer without any penalty. Alternative forms of bidding are available, such as by telephone or text messaging. In some circumstances, the Council may place bids on behalf of an applicant.
- 22.5 Applicants are able to see on Kent Homechoice whether they have been successful in bidding on a property, and if not, where on the shortlist they have been placed. Applicants within the same band will be prioritised in the order of their priority date, i.e. the date that the completed application and all required supporting information was received by the Council. The longer someone has been in housing need, the more likely they are to be successful.
- 22.6 Additional preference may be given to applicants' who have evidenced that a type of accommodation will have a demonstrable improvement for a child's well-being. Cases will be reviewed on an individual basis at short-listing by a Senior Homechoice Officer.

## **23 Adverts**

- 23.1 All adverts placed on the Kent Homechoice website are intended to be an accurate description of the property and include any alterations that have been made to assist independent living. Adverts are placed by the landlord and are not the responsibility of the Council. If an advert does not accurately reflect the property this should be drawn to the attention of the landlord. Applicants who are unhappy with the standard of the advert are advised to complain to the relevant landlord. Where necessary, e.g. persistently poor adverts whether notified by applicants or staff to the Homechoice and Strategy Manager will be referred to the Kent Homechoice Manager for further action to be taken.

## **24 The Quota**

- 24.1 The Council will set a quota to allocate the percentage of properties for each band. This quota will be set at the beginning of every financial year for the following year and, if appropriate, following an amendment to the Allocation Scheme.
- 24.2 The quota will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that best use of the housing stock is maintained. This review will be undertaken by the Homechoice and Strategy Manager. Any recommendation to change the quota must be approved by the Head of Housing and Community Services and the Chairman or in their absence the Vice Chairman of the Community, Housing and Environment Committee.
- 24.3 Properties which have been adapted to suit those with specific needs, such as those with flush floor showers, disabled access or stair lift etc will be advertised to the Medical and Health Assistance Band (Band M) first.
- 24.4 Properties that are subject to age restrictions (e.g. sheltered housing) or specific planning conditions such as Local Needs Housing will be advertised to all bands.

## **25 Direct Allocations**

- 25.1 The intention of the Council and its Housing Partners is that all vacancies are advertised and let through Kent Homechoice. However, there are occasions when it is not practical to do so. For example, when the Council is ending its Main Housing Duty and Relief Duty, as reflected in the Homelessness Reduction Act. Alternatively, some properties may not attract any bids and to minimise the number of empty properties in the borough the Council will match an applicant to a suitable property without the applicant necessarily bidding on the vacancy.
- 25.2 In the case where no bids have been received on a vacancy that was advertised to a specific Band, the advert will be extended and opened to all bands. In the event that no bids are received from any applicant the landlord can request a nomination from the Council which will constitute a direct allocation. These offers will be a suitable offer of accommodation and the usual penalties for refusal will apply.

- 25.3 A direct offer of accommodation can be a property that is either subsidised rent or private sector. The Council must make best use of whatever stock is available in the Borough. This may result in an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector.
- 25.4 The Council may agree with a landlord that certain properties in specific locations are more difficult to let. With the prior agreement of both parties these properties may be advertised to all Bands in the first instance. In certain cases, the Council may negotiate a reciprocal letting arrangement with another local authority, where one authority provides a vacant property on the basis that the receiving authority will provide one of their vacancies to the other authority at a later time.

## **26 Nominations**

- 26.1 The Council will nominate applicants to a property in accordance with the Allocation Scheme. The Council acknowledges that some housing providers retain their own allocation policy. There may be circumstances where the Council's nomination is declined by the housing provider. In those circumstances the applicant will be referred to the relevant housing provider by the Council to enable them to challenge the decision made by the housing provider, if the applicant wants to do so.
- 26.2 Where a successful nomination is made the housing provider will attempt to contact the applicant. If the applicant does not respond to the housing provider within 7 days of the initial contact the nomination will be deemed to be refused and paragraph 29.2 will be applied. Whilst being considered for an offer of a property, applicants will not be short-listed for other vacancies.

## **27 Ineligibility for an offer**

- 27.1 At the point of nomination, some applicants may be ineligible for an offer of accommodation. The Council reserves the right to determine an applicant ineligible for an offer of accommodation if it considers the applicant has been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable as a tenant. The Council will contact the applicant to inform them of decisions made under this section.
- 27.2 The reasons for determining an applicant ineligible for an offer may include (but are not limited to) the following:
- current rent arrears or rent arrears from previous tenancies within a reasonable period (e.g. 6 years) from either private or social tenancies, equivalent to a minimum of 8 weeks rent
  - arrears with Maidstone Council for a debt in relation to a tenancy, loan or other financial assistance provided by the Housing Service
  - a history of anti-social behaviour or has wilfully damaged previously rented accommodation

- 27.3 The Homechoice and Strategy Manager can apply discretion when determining if an applicant should initially be suspended from the register in accordance with section 27.4. Examples of where discretion may be applied are where the applicant is able to demonstrate a repayment agreement is in place and has been maintained for a reasonable period or where the applicant's rent charge has been found to be unaffordable by the relevant housing officer and the debt accrued at no fault of the applicant.
- 27.4 Applicants found ineligible under section 27.2 will be suspended from the register for 6 months. The application will be reviewed and reassessed after this time and another suspension may be applied. If after a further 6 month suspension period an applicant is still found to be ineligible, they may be removed from the register.
- 27.5 If an applicant has failed to provide the relevant information for their application to be verified or they haven't notified the Council of a change in circumstances that would result in a material change to their housing needs, they may be ineligible for an offer at the point of nomination.
- 27.6 An applicant may be asked to provide additional or updated information in order to verify their application at the point of nomination. If an applicant fails to respond to this request within 28 days their application will be considered incomplete and removed.
- 27.7 An applicant's priority date will be amended to the date on which they become eligible for an offer of accommodation.
- 27.8 An applicant is able to request a review of the Council's initial decision that they are ineligible for an offer by writing to the Senior Homechoice Officer (see Appendix B).

## **28 Suitability**

- 28.1 The suitability of an offer of accommodation is considered for all applicants as part of the allocations process. The test of suitability will be determined by the statutory basis of the offer (see paragraph 28.5)
- 28.2 Suitability of accommodation will be determined by the following factors:
- Bedroom standard
  - HHSRS assessment
  - Affordability
  - Accessibility for those with mobility issues
- 28.3 Location will not ordinarily be a factor in suitability unless there are specific concerns relating to an area. In these cases, the Senior Homechoice Officer will decide if the offer was suitable or not. The Council will follow the relevant Code of Guidance (issued by the government) and case-law to determine the relevant factors to be considered in determining suitability.

- 28.4 An applicant is able to request a review of the Council's decision that an offer was suitable by writing to the Homechoice and Strategy Manager (see Appendix B).
- 28.5 For applicants owed a housing duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, in assessing suitability of a final offer of accommodation, consideration will be given to relevant legislation and guidance. Applicants will have the right to request a review of the suitability of any offer of accommodation offered to discharge a duty under sections 189B to 193C and 195. Applicants should be advised of their right to request a review having accepted an offer, as this secures the accommodation whilst the review is considered.
- 29 Refusals**
- 29.1 Refusals on the grounds of suitability will be assessed by the Senior Homechoice Officer based upon the suitability section (Section 28) of this document.
- 29.2 Applicants who refuse a property will have their priority date set to the date on which they refused the offer of accommodation, effectively reducing their priority within the band.
- 29.3 An applicant is able to request a review of the Council's decision to refuse an application by writing to the Homechoice and Strategy Manager (see Appendix B).
- 29.4 For applicants owed a housing duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, a Senior Officer within the Housing Advice Team will make a decision on whether the final offer of accommodation was suitable, considering any additional information provided by the applicant and whether, as a result of a refusal of the final offer, the housing duty owed to the applicant will be discharged. Applicants should be advised of their right to request a review having accepted an offer, as this secures the accommodation whilst the review is considered.

## Part 6 – Miscellaneous

### 30 Gypsy and Traveller Sites

- 30.1 The Council recognises that because of the particular circumstances of the Gypsy and Traveller community it may not be appropriate to follow normal housing allocation policy.
- 30.2 Applicants can register their interest in vacant site plots by completing a Housing Register application form and indicating that they require a plot on a site.
- 30.3 Plots will be allocated, where available, to members of the Gypsy and Traveller community who can provide evidence that they live in or regularly frequent Maidstone borough. If they live in the Borough, evidence should be provided as stated in Appendix A of this scheme.

- 30.4 Applicants for vacancies will be considered in the order of when their completed application form and all required supporting information was received by the Council.

### **31 Applicants in Prison**

- 31.1 If an applicant is due to be released from prison imminently and confirmation has been received from the Prison Service or Community Rehabilitation Company, an applicant may be considered as having a Housing Need. The normal local connection criteria would still apply. Where an applicant who is in prison does not meet the local connection criteria set out in Section 10 they will be unable to join the register and will be directed to the area in which they had a local connection prior to their sentence.
- 31.2 Applicants who have served a period in custody at a prison located in Maidstone, or at approved premises will not meet the local connection criteria on that basis alone.

### **32 High Risk Offenders**

- 32.1 The housing of high risk offenders will be carried out as part of a multi-agency arrangement with the Police, National Probation Service, Social Services and other appropriate agencies and an Accommodation Specific Housing Risk Assessment will need to be completed by the National Probation Service.
- 32.2 An area or type of property acceptable to the Council will be agreed in partnership with the agencies involved. High risk offenders will be offered limited choice through Kent Homechoice. Where there are urgent issues, the Homechoice and Strategy Manager may consider a direct offer, taking into account all relevant matters concerning the applicant.

### **33 National Witness Mobility Scheme (NWMS)**

- 33.1 The NWMS is funded and managed by the Office of Criminal Justice Reform in the Home Office and works with police forces and housing authorities to assist with the re-housing of seriously intimidated witnesses.
- 33.2 The scheme enables witnesses to relocate outside their area to a place of safety.
- 33.3 NWMS work with Maidstone Council. The Council will investigate whether it has a duty to assist with accommodation because the applicant is threatened with homelessness and it is not reasonable for them to return.
- 33.4 The applicant will need to complete a housing register form and the Senior Homechoice Officer will consider the appropriate priority. Due to the high demand for subsidised housing in the borough the Council will accept up to 2 nominations per financial year from the NWMS under this voluntary scheme.

## **34 Other Accommodation**

- 34.1 There are a number of supported housing projects in Maidstone that are suitable for people with support needs. These include supported housing for:
- Young people
  - People with mental health needs
  - People with substance misuse needs
  - People with other vulnerabilities
  - People who are homeless
  - Offenders
  - People who require assisted housing
  - Almshouses
- 34.2 The Council has nomination rights to certain schemes managed by housing associations or other agencies. Some of the schemes provide long-term accommodation whereas others assume that there will be a requirement for the resident to move on either after a certain period or when they are capable of living independently.
- 34.3 Supported housing projects are often let on a short to medium term basis. Anyone in the last six months of their stay in supported accommodation will be defined as having a housing need but must still fulfil the local connection criteria. Applicants in supported accommodation for more than 2 years will fulfil local connection criteria by virtue of residency.
- 34.4 When the supported housing provider considers that the applicant is capable of sustaining a tenancy in general needs housing (with appropriate support) and provides evidence, the applicant will be deemed as having a housing need.
- 34.5 If an applicant is successful in securing a vacancy in a supported housing property, their housing register application will be suspended until the supported accommodation provider considers that the applicant is capable of sustaining a tenancy in general needs housing (see paragraph 34.4). The applicant will be required to complete a Change of Address form to update their Housing Register application.

## **35 Selection criteria and priorities for supported housing**

- 35.1 Applicants who may require supported accommodation or support to be provided to sustain their tenancy will be referred to the relevant agency providing that support.
- 35.2 All applicants are assessed according to their needs and support requirements at the time of the referral, together with any potential risk they may present to themselves and others.



- 35.3 The assessment is made to determine the most appropriate type of accommodation for the applicant, the level and type of support and respective priority compared to other applicants.
- 35.4 Where a social or support service is provided in conjunction with the accommodation, only applicants who are considered to require and benefit from that service will be considered for that accommodation. Examples of this type of accommodation would include extra care housing for older people, housing designated for special needs such as young people, people with mental health problems, or those known to be sleeping rough or who have no housing whatsoever.
- 35.5 Some general needs accommodation will be allocated to those in need of floating support. Allocation to such properties will be agreed in partnership with the housing association concerned and the support provider. Such applicants may be nominated to that accommodation regardless of their position under the Allocation Scheme.

### **36 Processing applications from older people**

- 36.1 Some accommodation has criteria defined by age which will be in the property advert. Applicants over the age of 60 will be considered for sheltered accommodation if assessed suitable by the housing provider. Some housing providers will accept applicants aged 50 plus. Applicants can also bid for designated sheltered accommodation through Kent Homechoice. They may also be referred by relatives, social workers or GPs, or the Council's medical advisor may recommend sheltered accommodation. If contact is made by a third party the applicant will need to be contacted and asked to complete an application form.
- 36.2 Once a bid is placed through Kent Homechoice, an officer from the housing provider recommends whether the applicant is suitable for sheltered accommodation or whether extra care is thought to be appropriate. Those who appear to need a higher level of support and/or care may be referred to adult services. A recommendation for extra care will also be dealt with through the housing register. Adult services may make a referral direct to the Council.

### **37 Adapted Properties**

- 37.1 Where accommodation has been designed or adapted to provide facilities which are intended specifically for use by a disabled person, only applicants whose household includes a person who is considered to require those facilities will be able to bid for that accommodation. These properties will be advertised to applicants in the Health Assistance band (Band M). This might include a wheelchair accessible property or a property which has been substantially adapted.



- 37.2 In the event that there are no suitable applicants bidding on the property the Council may consider a direct allocation to an applicant requiring the facilities to make the best use of the adaptations. In the event that there is no suitable applicant in any of the Bands, the property may be re-advertised to allow applicants to bid for the property who do not require the adaptations.

### **38 Local Lettings Policies**

- 38.1 Local lettings plans are lettings policies which form part of the housing nomination process. They apply to a limited part of the housing stock where the Council has nomination rights and will be determined by site and when the properties are released for occupation. In consultation with relevant Housing providers, the Council may adopt a local letting policy. This is to achieve a balanced community on a new development or to tackle issues in an existing locality where there are management problems and the properties have become less desirable. The Council has referred to the principles agreed within the Kent Housing Group (Creating Successful Communities in Kent and Medway protocol) when drafting local lettings plans.
- 38.2 With the exception of paragraph 38.5, local lettings plans normally apply to the initial allocation on new developments. Where a local lettings plan is agreed for an established development the Council and relevant landlord may monitor the impact of the lettings plan to ensure it meets the stated aims of the plan.
- 38.3 The Council maintains a standard local lettings plan which will form the basis of all local lettings plans to assist developers, landlords and other interested parties in drafting the planning contribution agreement.
- 38.4 In order for the Council to meet the aims and priorities as stated at the start of this document, the Allocation Scheme takes priority over any agreed local lettings plan.
- 38.5 Where accommodation is subject to a planning agreement or other restrictions, only applicants who can meet the terms of the agreement or restriction will be allocated accommodation. This may be the case for housing in some rural areas which is intended for occupation by local people. The Council may also consider direct offers for properties subject to a local lettings plan or planning agreements.

### **39 Decants (urgently moving existing housing association tenants)**

- 39.1 Decants apply to social housing tenants only. Where single properties are decanted, e.g. to undertake extensive planned or emergency repairs (where the tenants are required to be moved to temporary accommodation), the landlord will identify temporary accommodation from within their own stock and this will be allocated outside of the Kent Homechoice scheme. The tenant will return to their home following completion of the repairs.

- 39.2 Where large-scale redevelopment proposals require tenants to leave their homes whilst the properties or a specified area is redeveloped, the relevant landlord is required to consult with the Homechoice and Strategy Manager so that the approach can be agreed prior to the redevelopment scheme being confirmed. An appropriate Local Lettings Plan will be drafted that meets the requirements of the landlord, seeks to minimise the impact on the overall availability of vacant homes and on tenants, and where appropriate enables existing tenants to return to the same area.

#### **40 Management Moves**

- 40.1 Management moves will be the responsibility of the housing providers to operate and will not form part of the Allocations Scheme. Management Moves are intended to operate in exceptional circumstances where rapid housing to alternative accommodation is required within the landlord's stock, for example where the property has dangerous structural defect.
- 40.2 The landlord is required to notify the Council when such a move has been made, the reason and details of the properties concerned.

#### **41 Reciprocals**

- 41.1 Maidstone Borough Council has signed up to the Kent and Medway Reciprocal Scheme. This is a voluntary scheme between the 13 Kent and Medway authorities to support the duty to co-operate under S.213 of the Housing Act 1996. The scheme's aim is to prevent households from becoming homeless as a result of domestic abuse or violence/ serious harassment from outside the home.
- 41.2 Where the Council has agreed to assist another Local Authority under this scheme, the applicant will assess the applicant in accordance with this Scheme, however, the local connection criteria will not apply.

#### **42 Applications from Maidstone Borough Council Employees and Elected members**

- 42.1 Applications from employees and elected members of Maidstone Borough Council (including applications where the employee or elected member is part of the household in the application) will be assessed in accordance with the Allocation Scheme and will have to meet the same qualifying criteria in order to be accepted on to the register.
- 42.2 Employees of Maidstone Borough Council should not use any internal housing systems to access their account or those of their family members and/or associates. Where a conflict of interest may arise, the officer should bring this to the attention of their line manager.

## **43 Glossary**

### **Children**

Children are defined as those aged under 18 for whom the applicant is legally responsible or has proven shared legal responsibility. An adult child for the purposes of local connection would be considered immediate family.

### **Domestic Abuse**

Domestic abuse is defined as violence from an associated person, which includes partner, siblings, and parents. The violence may include an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional.

Where a case of Domestic Abuse has been established and no other options are available/appropriate, including the Council's Sanctuary Scheme, the applicant will be placed into the relevant Band according to their characteristics.

### **Family**

For the purposes of this Allocation Scheme, family will mean immediate family. This will include siblings, parents and children.

### **Hate Crimes**

Hate crimes can be defined as violence/harassment based on an individuals' race, ethnicity, disability, gender or sexual orientation. The harassment may involve physical or verbal intimidation.

Where a case of hate crime has been established and no other options are available or appropriate, then a managed move may be agreed with a housing provider.

### **HHSRS**

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System was established by the Housing Act 2004. It provides for the assessment of 29 health and safety hazards found in housing and a method by which they are rated to identify those hazards that present the greatest risk to occupiers.

### **Crime and Disorder**

Where an applicant is the victim of a serious incident of crime or disorder in their home, the Council's Community Safety Unit will work with them to enable them to stay in their home, if that is the most appropriate option.

**Social Housing Tenant**

A social housing tenant is someone who rents a property from a local council or housing provider.

**No Fixed Abode**

Not having a fixed geographical location as a residence.

## 44 **Appendix A**

Documents required from the applicant to be accepted on to the housing register or upon consideration of an allocation of accommodation

### **Eligibility**

#### **1. EEA Nationals, but not UK citizens**

Valid passport for each household member

Evidence of at least one year's completed employment in the UK prior to May 2011

Evidence of any employment since May 2011, for example a wage slip or P60

Any other evidence that proves eligibility for subsidised housing

#### **2. Non-EEA Nationals**

Valid passport for each household member

Proof of indefinite leave to remain

Any other evidence that proves eligibility for subsidised housing.

### **Additional Information**

#### **1. Proof of identity**

For each named applicant photographic identification, for example, a valid passport or photo driving licence, or similar document and your national insurance number.

#### **2. Proof of income**

Salary/wage slips for the past two months

Proof of any income-related benefits received, for example, income support

Statements from all bank, building society and savings accounts for the past two months

#### **3. Proof of your address/tenure**

Tenancy agreement if there is a tenancy, if not recently addressed correspondence.

#### **4. If you have children living with you**

Birth certificate for each child, and

Proof of receipt of child benefit

#### **5. If you have access to children that do not live with you full time**

Residence Order if available, or letter from the child's full time carer detailing the access arrangements, including the frequency of visits, the length of time they have been in place, and any future arrangements.

**6. If you own, or have ever owned, a property**

Current mortgage statement and recent valuation of the property.  
Confirmation of the amount received from the sale or transfer of the property.

**7. Medical Information**

Documentation provided from an NHS medical professional, or an equivalent external agency.

**8. Voluntary, charitable work or training**

A letter or email from an employee of the group/organisation to confirm that you volunteer or carry out charitable work for a minimum of 10 hours a week and have done so on a consistent basis for at least 6 months.

A letter or email from the college, university or training organisation providing the details of the course being undertaken including the start and finish dates of the course.

**9. Right to Move**

A contract of employment.  
A formal offer/acceptance of employment letter.  
Proof of current address.

Section	Subject of Review Request	Officer Conducting the Review	Time Limit	Response Time
3	Eligibility for Allocation for Housing	Senior Homechoice Officer	28 days from decision	56 days from request
5	Access to Personal Information	Data Protection Officer	Not applicable	Within 28 days
9	Local Connection	Senior Homechoice Officer	21 days from decision	56 days from request
10	Housing Need	Senior Homechoice Officer	21 days from decision	56 days from request
11	Financial Circumstances	Senior Homechoice Officer	21 days from decision	56 days from request
15	Bedroom Allocation – Extra bedroom	Homechoice and Strategy Manager	21 days from decision	56 days from request
16	Being on the Register	Senior Homechoice Officer	21 days from decision	56 days from request
18	Community Contribution Band	Senior Homechoice Officer	21 days from decision	56 days from request
27	Ineligibility for an offer	Senior Homechoice Officer	21 days from decision	56 days from request
28	Suitability	Homechoice and Strategy Manager	21 days from decision	56 days from request
29	Refusals	Homechoice and Strategy Manager	21 days from decision	56 days from request
37	Local Lettings Policies	Homechoice and Strategy Manager	21 days from decision	56 days from request

## **Appendix C**

### **Stage 1: Equality Impact Assessment**

#### **1. What are the main aims purpose and outcomes of the Policy and how do these fit with the wider aims of the organization?**

The current Allocation Scheme was introduced in 2013. Amendments are being proposed to support homelessness prevention by giving additional preference to households threatened with homelessness and discouraging the use of temporary accommodation as a way of accessing social housing quicker.

The Housing Allocation Scheme assists in the delivery of the council's priorities as stated in the Strategic Plan, most notably the Homes and Communities priority. It further supports both the 'Health Inequalities are addressed and reduced' and 'Deprivation and Social Mobility is improved' cross cutting objectives by ensuring that the Council has an Allocation Scheme that treats all applicants fairly and that access to social housing supports the needs of residents.

.

#### **2. How do these aims affect our duty to:**

- **Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization and other conduct prohibited by the act.**
- **Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.**
- **Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.**

The revised scheme will ensure the fair and transparent treatment of all applicants.

Monthly monitoring of the outcomes from gaining access to the housing register and bidding activity will provide continuous reassurance.

The revised scheme will equalise opportunity to access the register between those with and those without protected characteristics.

#### **3. What aspects of the policy including how it is delivered or accessed could contribute to inequality?**

The revised Allocation Scheme will not contribute to inequality. It has clear roles and responsibilities defined in order to ensure clarity of decision making and implementation.



**4. Will the policy have an impact (positive or negative) upon the lives of people, including particular communities and groups who have protected characteristics ? What evidence do you have for this?**

The revised Allocation Scheme continues to provide a fair system of prioritising applicants based on their time waiting on the housing register. This applies to all applicants.

Persons with a medical or welfare need will be safeguarded by ensuring that a fair proportion of subsidised housing vacancies are provided to this category based on evidence of number of households with those characteristics on the housing register and vacancies arising.

## Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

**Tuesday 12  
November 2019**

### Maidstone Approach Improvement Project

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Communities, Housing and Environment Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration and Place
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Jennifer Shepherd, Head of Environment and Public Realm
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	Bearsted, Boxley, Shepway North and High Street

#### Executive Summary

The Maidstone Approach Improvement Project is an initiative to pilot improvements to the street scene and landscaping on a key arterial route. The Ashford Road from Willington Street to Kings Street was chosen as the initial pilot as it offers the greatest opportunity including open spaces, street furniture and range of landownership. With a budget of £74,000 from the Business Rates Retention Pilot, a range of actions and concepts have been identified. These were presented to the Committee in October and this report now seeks approval for the final designs.

#### Purpose of Report

Decision

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

1. To approve the installation of a new heritage-style 'Welcome to Maidstone' sign on the A20 with the words "The County Town of Kent"; and
2. To approve four installations to celebrate the heritage and history of Maidstone, specifically an Iguanodon silhouette, bicycle silhouettes, hop frame and planting as well as Go Green Go Wild inspired tree carving; and
3. To approve the concept of a townscape silhouette attached to safety railings, pending further operational exploration.

#### Timetable

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Communities, Housing and Environment Committee	Tuesday 12 November 2019

# Maidstone Approach Improvement Project

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	<p>The key objective of this project is to improve the appearance of one of Maidstone's arterial routes. The improvements are designed to contribute to achieving two of the Council's Strategic Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Safe, Clean and Green</i></li> <li>• <i>A Thriving Place</i></li> </ul>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
<b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>	<p>The proposed plans consider the heritage of the Borough through highlighting key areas the Borough and County are known for including being the Garden of England.</p> <p>The landscaping designs focus on enhancing biodiversity which allowing visitors and residents to understand the importance of this. The project will incorporate the Go Green Go Wild initiative into its designs.</p> <p>The report supports the achievements of the Heritage and Biodiversity cross cutting objectives.</p>	Head of Environment and public Realm
<b>Risk Management</b>	This has been included in section 5.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
<b>Financial</b>	<p>The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.</p> <p>The Policy and Resources Committee have already approved a budget of £74,000 from the Business Rates Retention Pilot to fund this project.</p>	Finance Manager
<b>Staffing</b>	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Head of Environment and Public Realm

<b>Legal</b>	<p>Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities in England a general power of competence to do anything that individuals may do. The general power applies to things that an individual may do even though they are in nature, extent or otherwise unlike anything the Council may do apart from Section 1. The proposed Improvement Project is in exercise of the general power. Although Section 2 of the Act sets boundaries to the general power, the proposals fall within those boundaries.</p> <p>Any necessary agreements or contracts entered into as a result of the proposals must be in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. Agreements and contracts should be in a form approved by the Legal Services Manager and should identify key activities and outputs so that performance can be properly and regularly monitored.</p> <p>The Communities, Housing and Environment Committee are responsible for ensuring that the Council delivers its strategic objectives with regard to Communities, Housing and the Environment including the Safe, Clean and Green objective. As such it is for the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee to approve the proposals.</p>	Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS
<b>Privacy and Data Protection</b>	There are no specific privacy or data protection issues to address.	Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS
<b>Equalities</b>	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment	Head of Environment and Public Realm
<b>Public Health</b>	<p>A key feature of the proposals is to increase walking and cycling on this route into the Town Centre.</p> <p>We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.</p>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	There will be no impact.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
<b>Procurement</b>	The purchase of all equipment and supplies	Head of

	required for the project will be carried out according to the Procurement Rules.	Environment and Public Realm
--	--	------------------------------

## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In June 2019, the Policy and Resources Committee approved a budget of £74,000 from the Business Rates Retention Pilot to fund improvements to one of Maidstone's arterial routes – Ashford Road (Willington Street to Kings Street).
- 1.2 The Maidstone Approach Improvement Project will incorporate street scene and landscaping improvements to deliver a number of objectives:
- Improve the visual appearance of the Ashford Road for visitors to Maidstone
  - Support the Council's Strategic Objectives for **A Thriving Place** and a **Safe, Clean and Green** environment
  - Highlighting the heritage of the Borough
  - Enhancing biodiversity along one of Maidstone's busy arterial routes
  - Encouraging walking and cycling into the Town Centre
- 1.3 Initial discussions have been held with Kent Highways and Soft Estates who are supportive of the proposals. The proposals have also been shared with Turkey Mill's estate management who are also very supportive and are now considering making improvements to their entrance onto the A20.
- 1.4 The following key actions have been identified:
- Deep clean – removal of detritus from along Mote Park wall
  - Cut back of vegetation and removal of self-sown saplings growing along the wall
  - New bus shelter at junction with New Cut Road
  - New bollards
  - Improved appearance of railings
  - Planting of bulbs to increase colour
  - Shaping of wild areas to enhance biodiversity and enable habitat development
  - Planting of new trees

- New signage including heritage board and “Welcome to Maidstone” sign
  - New street name plates
  - Creation of heritage features with interpretation board
  - Repainting streetlights
- 1.5 Regrettably despite every effort to engage with Network Rail, they have failed to support the project in any way. This included enabling Council operatives to work on their land between Mote Park wall and their security fence. Therefore, the only area along this route which will not be improved will be the railway bridge by Square Hill Road and vegetation on their land.
- 1.6 A presentation was given to the Committee in October 2019 to discuss the proposals and gain any feedback regarding the heritage installations and signage. The Committee provided positive feedback on the proposals and supported the scheme.
- 1.7 The Committee is now asked to approve the following aspects of the scheme:
- Heritage-style ‘Welcome to Maidstone’ sign
  - Iguanodon silhouette
  - Bicycle silhouettes
  - Ornamental frame with hops
  - Go Green Go Wild inspired tree carvings
  - Townscape railing silhouettes

### **Heritage-style ‘Welcome to Maidstone’ sign**

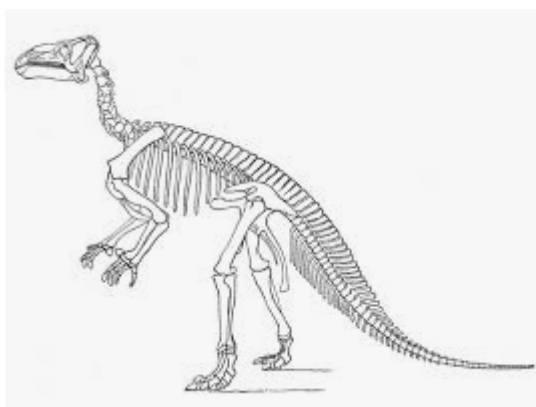
- 1.8 It is recommended that a heritage-style sign is used along the route in the vicinity of Turkey Mill. After discussion at Committee last month, the following design has been created which would be in Maidstone Blue in line with the lamp columns and bollards along the route.

- 1.9 It is recommended that the wording is changed to say, "The County Town of Kent".



#### **Iguanodon and Bicycle Silhouettes**

- 1.10 Around the new bus shelter at the junction of New Cut Road, coloured grasses are being planted to introduce colour. Given the interest in Maidstone's Iguanodon which appears on the crest, it is recommended that in conjunction with Maidstone Museum, an Iguanodon skeleton silhouette is installed in front of Mote Park wall. This will be accompanied by an interpretation board which will outline the history and promote Maidstone Museum.



- 1.11 It is anticipated that creating a point of interest by the bus stop more local residents may be encouraged to travel into Town through this route.
- 1.12 In addition, New Cut Road is the start of a cycle path that leads into the Town Centre. To raise awareness of this, it is recommended that silhouettes of three bicycles are installed alongside the path.

### **Ornamental frame with hops**

- 1.13 As the Garden of England, Kent's farming heritage should be celebrated. A number of blossoming fruit trees and Kent Cobnut trees are to be planted in a scalloped area opposite Turkey Mill. Currently this area is covered in bramble and nettles and whilst this provides a biodiverse habitat, it is not necessarily understood or appreciated by those walking, cycling or driving past.
- 1.14 Therefore, a mown strip and scalloped edges will provide a more visually appealing area and is likely to increase biodiversity along the edges where habitats blend.
- 1.15 As well as planting fruiting trees, it is recommended that a 'hop frame' is created. A frame which was previously located in Week Street will be reused and hops planted up it as reference to both our farming and beer-making heritage. This will be supported by an interpretation board.

### **Go Green Go Wild inspired tree carvings**

- 1.16 *Go Green Go Wild* is becoming a recognised symbol of Maidstone's drive to enhance biodiversity. Therefore, it is recommended that this is incorporated into the Maidstone Approach Improvement Project. A wildflower meadow will be sown at the junction of Willington Street along with a large 'bug hotel' like the design below.



- 1.17 To create greater visual impact and interest in the initiative, it is recommended that *Go Green Go Wild* inspired chainsaw carvings are incorporated into the designs for the A20.
- 1.18 Between Turkey Mill and New Cut Road there are two tall tree stumps. It is recommended that these are carved with Kentish flora and fauna reliefs such as insects and leaves, whilst retaining the structure and integrity of the original tree.

### **Railings**

- 1.19 There are 102 railings along the route and although essential for road safety, they are not particularly attractive. Unfortunately, it would be very expensive to replace all the railings or have them painted. Therefore, alternative options have been explored and a prototype of a townscape



silhouette has been produced, see image below. These would be attached to every third railing to improve their visual appearance whilst retaining their safety requirement. There is still some further work needed to confirm this proposal is achievable however it is recommended that the Committee approve the concept, pending further operational exploration.



- 1.20 Following the suggestion from the Committee in October, a sign along Mote Park wall at the entrance opposite Weaving Street will be installed to promote the park.
- 

### **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 The Committee could agree to approve the recommendations set out in the report, specifically
- The installation of a new heritage-style 'Welcome to Maidstone' sign on the A20 with the words "The County Town of Kent"; and
  - Four installations to celebrate the heritage and history of Maidstone, specifically an Iguanodon silhouette, bicycle silhouettes, hop frame and planting as well as Go Green Go Wild inspired tree carving; and
  - The concept of a townscape silhouette attached to safety railings, pending further operational exploration.
- 3.2 This would enable the project to be completed with points of interest and deliver its original objectives to contribute to a *Thriving Place*.
- 3.3 However, despite the Committee's support at October's meeting, they could decide not to approve the heritage aspects of the design. This will result in the overall affect of the improvements being less impactful and will not deliver the additional benefits of the scheme such as promoting cycling or highlighting the Borough's heritage and history.
- 3.4 Alternatively, the Committee could propose other ideas to be incorporated into the design, however given the progress of the project, this could significantly affect the budget or not be deliverable.
- 

### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Committee approve the recommendations set out in 3.1 as these were presented at the previous month's meeting and were widely supported. They will also add further interest and impact in the landscaping and street scene improvements currently being implemented.

The proposals have also gained support from Kent County Council and the Estate Management at Turkey Mill.

---

## **5. RISK**

5.1 The key risks associated with the proposals are:

- Public perception of the heritage features
- Safety of new installations

5.2 There is always a risk with such heritage features that public opinion will be subjective. However, the features proposed are low cost and will each provide wider added benefits such as promoting the Museum, enhancing biodiversity and encourage healthier lifestyles through walking and cycling.

5.3 Safety has been at the forefront of all the work being undertaken along the route and full approval will be gained from Kent Highways prior to installation. They have been actively engaged through the process and have already carried out a safety audit of the road. Therefore, the risk to safety is exceptionally low and their condition will be monitored regularly as part of the street cleansing service.

5.4 Therefore, the two risks are within the Council's risk appetite and will be monitored throughout the remainder of the project.

5.5 There is no significant risk to the Council of not implementing the recommendations however the full positive impact of the improvements will not be delivered without these features.

---

## **6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

6.1 The proposals were presented to the Committee last month and received unanimous support.

6.2 The Chair of the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group has also been engaged with regard to the improvements along the A20 and their impact on biodiversity.

6.3 Positive feedback has also been received from the Estate Management at Turkey Mill, Kent Highways and Kent Soft Estates.

---

## **7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

7.1 If the recommendations are approved, work will commence on the final design and production of the silhouettes with installation planned for early next year.

---

## **8. REPORT APPENDICES**

None

---

## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

# Agenda Item 17

## Communities, Housing and Environment

**Tuesday 12  
November 2019**

### Draft Biodiversity Strategy

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Communities, Housing and Environment Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration and Place
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Jennifer Shepherd, Head of Environment and Public Realm Andrew Williams, Parks and Open Spaces Manager
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

#### Executive Summary

Maidstone's draft Biodiversity Strategy has been prepared by Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (MVCP) on behalf of, and in conjunction with, Maidstone's Parks and Open Spaces Team. The newly formed Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group was consulted on the draft document and provided a comprehensive response. This report sets out their recommendations with commentary from MVCP and the Parks and Open Spaces Team. The Committee is asked to consider the comments and agree their incorporation into the final Biodiversity Strategy.

#### Purpose of Report

Decision

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

1. To consider the recommendations made by the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group and to agree their inclusion within the draft Biodiversity Strategy as they deem appropriate;

#### Timetable

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Communities Housing and Environment Committee	Tuesday 12 November 2019

# Draft Biodiversity Strategy

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	The Biodiversity Strategy supports the Council's Strategic Plan objective of "Safe Clean and Green" by focusing on the protection, re-establishment and reconnection of habitats across the Borough to enhance the diversity of flora and fauna.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
<b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>	The Strategy will cross a number of Council departments, services and external stakeholders delivering one of the Councils four cross-cutting objectives; <i>Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected.</i>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
<b>Risk Management</b>	This is covered in Section 5.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
<b>Financial</b>	To successfully deliver the objectives set out in the Draft Biodiversity Strategy, significant investment will be required. Protecting biodiversity is a long-term commitment and investment is likely to be focused around the protection of landscapes and the acquisition of land to retain open space within areas of development. Such investment is likely to be funded through CIL or S106 contributions. The extent to which the recommendations of the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group are adopted within the Strategy will have financial implications. However, the extent of the financial implications would be considered through the annual delivery plan for the Strategy.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Staffing</b>	It is intended that the implementation of the Strategy will be led by the existing staff within the Parks and Open Spaces Team however will require significant support from colleagues within the Planning Team to deliver the Council's aspirations. Support from key partners such as Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (MVCP) will also be fundamental in delivering the objectives.	Head of Environment and Public Realm

	The extent to which the recommendations of the Working Group are agreed will impact the resourcing requirements to deliver the Strategy.	
<b>Legal</b>	<p>The Council has statutory duties requiring it in exercising its functions to have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.</p> <p>Officers are concerned that there are elements within the Climate Change and Working Group's recommendations that may not meet the Council's statutory obligations, particularly in relation to addressing invasive species. Those concerns are detailed in officers' commentary in Appendix 2 to the main report.</p>	Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS
<b>Privacy and Data Protection</b>	The recommendations within this report will have no impact on privacy or data protection.	Policy and Information Team
<b>Equalities</b>	The recommendations within this report do not propose specific service changes that would require an equalities impact assessment. However, this will be considered as part of the Annual Action Plan to ensure any specific changes do not have varying impacts on different communities within Maidstone.	[Policy & Information Manager]
<b>Public Health</b>	We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	The recommendation will not have a negative impact on Crime and Disorder	Head of Environment and Public Realm
<b>Procurement</b>	At the current time there are no specific procurement requirements, however where these are identified as part of the Annual Action Plan, this will be carried out in line with the Contract Rules.	Head of Environment and Public Realm

## **2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Biodiversity (or biological diversity) describes the variety of life around us; both between and within ecosystems and habitats and including the variety of different species and the genetic variation within species. It is considered the most important indicator of the state of our environment.
- 2.2 Biodiversity became a global agenda in 1992 when 150 governments around the world signed the Convention on Biological Diversity at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Since then the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) was launched, followed by regional (SEEBF) and local plans (LBAP) all identifying actions to conserve and enhance priority habitats and species.
- 2.3 Maidstone formally adopted its Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) in 2011 and covered the period 2009-2014. It was jointly produced by the Council's Parks and Leisure Team and Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (MVCP).
- 2.4 Over the past 10 years there have been significant changes to the approach to conservation management and the political environment. Most significantly, LBAPs are no longer part of the national approach to managing biodiversity. Conservation management at a borough level has been subsumed as an appendix to or as part of local plans and other statutory documents.
- 2.5 In 2018 the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee agreed to fund a refresh of the Biodiversity Action Plan. Medway Valley Countryside Partnership were tasked with preparing this as a new Biodiversity Strategy, which has now been completed. The draft Strategy is included in Appendix 1.
- 2.6 MVCP undertook engagement with local stakeholders to help shape the Strategy including Boxley Warren Group, River Len Nature Reserve, Hollingbourne Meadows Trust, Maidstone Green Drinks and Fant Wildlife Group. A workshop was also convened at Maidstone Museum as part of the work.
- 2.7 The Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group has been consulted on the draft Strategy and has provided a comprehensive response, attached as Appendix 3.
- 2.8 The key recommendations within this response are included in Appendix 2 along with commentary from MVCP and Parks officers. This is presented to the Committee to consider and agree to incorporate into the draft Strategy as they deem appropriate.

---

## **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 The Communities, Housing and Environment Committee could accept all of the recommendations set out within the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group's response and request that the draft Strategy is amended accordingly.

- 3.2 The Committee could identify a number of specific recommendations within the Working Group's response that should be incorporated into the Strategy. All other recommendations would be noted but not incorporated into the final document.
- 3.3 Alternatively, the Committee could decide to retain the original draft Strategy and not adopt the recommendations made by the Working Group.
- 

#### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 It is recommended that the option set out in 3.2 is agreed and that the Committee consider each of the recommendations, comments from Medway Valley Countryside Partnership and the views of the Parks and Open Spaces Team to determine which are appropriate to be incorporated in to the Biodiversity Strategy.
- 4.2 The formal response to the draft Strategy from the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group is comprehensive and seeks to achieve an extremely ambitious Strategy which is at the forefront of national policy. Whilst creditable, this may have significant financial impacts which need to be considered as it is essential that the Strategy is deliverable.
- 4.3 There are also some recommendations that Medway Valley Countryside Partnership and Council Officers disagree with, as set out in Appendix 2. This includes the incorporation of 'biomass' into the Strategy, the removal of specific habitat consideration and inclusion of case studies that do not align with Maidstone's position.
- 4.4 Therefore, it is not recommended that the whole response is incorporated into the Strategy. Equally there are a number of valid comments which should be taken into consideration to increase the ambition of the document and improve engagement with the subject, such as focus on a key species and inclusion of a clear vision.
- 

#### **5. RISK**

- 5.1 There are two key risks associated with this report:
- **Deliverability** – whilst the extent of wildlife and habitat decline requires an ambition Strategy to tackle and reverse the impacts, both locally and contributing to the national picture, there is a risk it will be undeliverable. Although the Strategy is being led by the Parks and Open Spaces Team it will be reliant on the support of other departments, services and external stakeholders, which will pose a risk for its success. However, it is intended that the Strategy will be supported by an Annual Action Plan which will set out specific actions to deliver the objectives and will have a cross department working group.
  - **Opportunity** – whilst deliverability is a risk, there is also the risk of missed opportunity if the Strategy is not ambitious and forward-thinking



enough. With the worldwide concern about climate emergency and the link this has with biodiversity, the adoption of this Strategy is Maidstone's opportunity to be at the forefront of tackling the issue and taking a proactive approach to reversing the decline.

- 5.2 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.
- 

## **6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

- 6.1 This report presents the response from the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group to the draft Biodiversity Strategy.
- 6.2 During the preparation of the draft Strategy, Medway Valley Countryside Partnership consulted with a number of key stakeholders including local groups and nature reserves and held a workshop at Maidstone Museum. Their comments were used to shape the document and provide context to some of the principles.
- 

## **7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 7.1 The Parks Manager will work with Medway Valley Countryside Partnership to incorporate the decision of the Committee into the draft Strategy.
- 7.2 The final Biodiversity Strategy will then be brought back to the Committee in January 2020 for adoption. An Annual Action Plan will then be prepared by an officers' working group and will be presented to the Committee in March 2020 for implementation in 2020/21.
- 

## **8. REPORT APPENDICES**

- Appendix 1: Draft Biodiversity Strategy
  - Appendix 2: Commentary on the recommendations within the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group consultation response
  - Appendix 3: Full response from the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group
- 

## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

# Saving Nature in Maidstone



‘Saving Nature in Maidstone’ is the biodiversity strategy for Maidstone Borough. It outlines how everyone can play a part in protecting and enhancing the borough’s wildlife.

Published: 10 September 2019.

Produced by Medway Valley Countryside Partnership on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council.

Written by Emily Seccombe, MVCP Partnership Officer.

Text copyright: Maidstone Borough Council.

All images were taken locally. Image copyright: Medway Valley Countryside Partnership.

Bee orchid in Allington Open Space

## Executive Summary

- Looking after the habitats and species in our local area is an important job for everyone in the borough, especially Maidstone Borough Council. Nature is vital to the quality of our lives and the functioning of our society and economy. We depend on it for clean air, food, climate regulation and flood prevention. Access to nature is key to our physical and mental health and wellbeing. How we care for our environment has both local and global consequences. Through this strategy, we hope to trigger action, guide decisions and support people to make a difference. This strategy determines our vision for 2020-2025 and identifies pressures on the environment, our goals and some target projects.
- This strategy outlines the need for local biodiversity action to counter the continued loss of biodiversity at global and local scales.
- The strategy identifies and describes the current pressures on wildlife in the borough. These include development, pollution, the climate crisis, intensive agriculture and invasive non-native species.
- The strategy highlights ways in which people can help to protect nature in Maidstone. This advice includes actions for Maidstone Borough Council, as well as local people and organisations. The latter takes the form of a Biodiversity Pledge. Local individuals, businesses, schools and groups can sign up to show their support for nature and commit to taking action. Information is provided as to where to go for advice and seek funding for biodiversity and conservation projects. To encourage landscape-level working, a list of potential partnership groups is available to support partnership working and applying for joint bids from funders.
- Maidstone has a range of habitats and species of note which are discussed in sections 7 and 8. Priority species (as identified in the Kent Biodiversity Strategy) are also discussed in section 7.4.
- Habitats have been split into four overarching groups: woodland, grassland and agriculture, water and wetlands, and urban habitats. Details on these (including information on current threats and actions) can be found in the Habitat sections 8.1-8.4.
- Key projects for the borough are identified. Following the publication of this strategy, Maidstone Borough Council will be responsible for identifying how they can implement the strategy's recommendations.
- Biodiversity in the Planning Process, a guidance note for planners and developers, can be found in Appendix A. This provides information for planners, developers submitting planning applications and parish councils writing a Neighbourhood Plan.



Orange tip butterfly



Beautiful demoiselle damselfly



## Top Ten Tips

### 1. Wild is good!

Less mowing and less tidying leads to more habitat. Less chemical control (pesticides and fertilisers) leads to more wildlife.

### 2. Create micro-habitats

Create glades and rides in woodland and aim for mosaics of different habitats not monocultures.

### 3. Prioritise native species

Use native species when planting, help tackle invasive non-native species on your land and reduce the spread of non-natives through biosecurity measures.

### 4. Large-scale habitat recreation

Convert low-diversity areas into thriving areas of woodland, wetland or wildlife-rich grassland.

### 5. Increase access to the countryside

The more people who value nature, the more it will be protected.

### 6. Reduce habitat fragmentation

Create and maintain corridors or stepping-stone sites. A small garden managed for wildlife can provide a stopping place between larger sites.

### 7. Consider climate

Increase resilience by promoting connectivity and creating microhabitats. Include climate resilience in all management plans for sites. Mitigate negative effects through green measures. Reduce contributions to climate change.

### 8. Reduce pressure in wider environment.

Sympathetically manage land which is not primarily managed for wildlife. Make behavioural changes to reduce harm.

### 9. Create buffers

Soften boundaries between land management types. Buffer wildlife sites by managing surrounding area in ways to reduce adverse effects on site.

### 10. Spend time outdoors

The more you get to know your local patch, the more you will protect it.

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	2
Top Ten Tips .....	3
1. Why do we need a biodiversity strategy? .....	5
2. What are the aims of this strategy? .....	8
3. What are ecosystem services? Why are they important? .....	8
4. What are the pressures on wildlife in Maidstone Borough? .....	11
5. How can I help? .....	19
5.1 Maidstone Biodiversity Pledge .....	19
5.2 Funding Sources .....	21
5.3 Advice and Information Sources .....	23
5.4 Partnership Working .....	24
6. What will Maidstone Borough Council do? .....	25
7. What have we got in Maidstone? .....	26
8. Habitats .....	39
8.1 Woodland .....	40
8.2 Urban Nature .....	45
8.3 Water and Wetlands .....	48
8.4 Grassland and Agriculture .....	53
9. Projects .....	59
10. Acknowledgements .....	61
11. Bibliography .....	62
Appendix A .....	66

Orange boxes contain definitions.

Blue boxes show how a concept is relevant to Maidstone.

Purple boxes contain political or technical detail.

Green boxes quote other sources.

Red Signposts direct to other parts of the document or other sources.

## 1. Why do we need a biodiversity strategy?

### Biodiversity:

Formally defined as the variability among living organisms and the interwoven ecological whole of which they are a part, including diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems. Simply, you can think of biodiversity as the diversity of wildlife, including species and habitats.



### 1.1 Biodiversity is in decline at global and local scales.

It is now widely acknowledged in the media that we have entered a sixth mass extinction - the first such event caused by human actions. The Making Space for Nature review (Lawton, et al., 2010) concluded that England's ecological network is neither resilient nor coherent. The State of Nature report found that 13% of Red List species found in Great Britain are at risk of extinction here (The State of Nature partnership, 2016). The drivers of biodiversity loss are increasing globally. (IPBES, 2019) We need to not only support our nature directly but also reduce the pressure we are putting on it.

Without a step-change in how we treat the environment, this decline will continue.

Our survival and quality of life is dependent on healthy ecosystems. The benefits we get from nature (known as ecosystem services) have been found to be in decline (UNEP-WCMC, 2014).

### Nature in crisis

A recent United Nations assessment described unprecedented losses of biodiversity, with an estimated "1 million species at risk of extinction, many within decades." "The biosphere, upon which humanity as a whole depends, is being altered to an unparalleled degree across all spatial scales... Biodiversity ... is declining faster than at any time in human history." (IPBES, 2019)

These benefits are explained in further detail and with local examples in section 3.

## 1.2 To prevent this loss, we need significant change across sectors.

This is not just a task for environmentalists, but for all of society. Tackling the declines in nature will also help us to tackle inequality and meet the Sustainable Development Goals (IPBES, 2019). Reducing our negative footprint on the environment can both benefit the residents of Maidstone and people in the least developed countries – “nature underpins achievement of [Sustainable Development Goals] on poverty, hunger, health, wellbeing, clean water” (IPBES, 2019). Natural England’s conservation strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Conservation 21, (Natural England, 2016)) also stressed need for a fundamental change in mindset – to make the natural environment a central part of health, wealth and prosperity.

### Need for a step-change

As the Making Space for Nature report says, “To turn the tide of biodiversity loss, we need to embrace a new visionary restorative phase of nature conservation. Without a step change, wildlife loss will continue.” (Lawton, et al., 2010).

## 1.3 The loss of diverse wildlife and healthy ecosystems are driven by two main factors.

1. **Habitat loss:** For example, in Kent over two thirds of the orchards and hops present in 1961 were lost by 2008. The loss of suitable wildlife habitat in Kent can be partly attributed to the increase in development from 10% to 17% over this time period. (ARCH, 2012)
2. **Decline in habitat quality:** This is often due to direct changes in management, as well as other factors such as pollution and climate change.

To achieve the change required, we need better habitat management, bigger areas managed for nature, increased connectivity and more areas for nature. (Lawton, et al., 2010).

But it is not just about improving designated nature areas. Defra’s 25 Year Plan includes the creation or restoration of 500,000 hectares<sup>1</sup> of wildlife rich habitat outside protected areas (Defra, 2018). Were this to be equally spread across all counties and districts, this would be in the realm of 820 ha in Maidstone borough. We need to work across sectors to “soften the matrix” (Lawton, et al., 2010) to make land, air and water outside of protected areas more habitable for wildlife. As pointed out in the recent United Nations report, we need a more integrated cross-sectoral approach and to consider biodiversity across sectors: “Sectoral policies often fail to account for indirect, distant and accumulative impacts” (IPBES, 2019).

Although this is a local strategy, the impacts of our behaviour in Maidstone have knock-on effects around the globe. Litter dropped in town centre can be carried out to sea by the Medway and cause harm to marine life. Pollutants entering the atmosphere have impacts on weather patterns around the world. Emissions from cars on the A229 contribute to global warming and rising sea-levels. It is vital that we better understand the interconnectivity of the world and how we are a part of the system.

“This is not a luxury. Establishing a coherent and resilient ecological network to help conserve the biodiversity that we still have will enhance our options and improve our chances of achieving a prosperous and healthy future for ourselves and our children.” (Lawton, et al., 2010).

<sup>1</sup> A hectare is a unit of an area equal in size to a square with sides of 100m, or 10,000m<sup>2</sup> total.

## 1.4 How does this strategy relate to other policies?

### Global policy:

Since the last Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy (2008), there has been a Convention on Biological Diversity in 2010 which set out key targets for biodiversity. This local Maidstone strategy has been written to align with the targets of the Convention. New Convention on Biological Diversity targets will be written following the 2020 convention, and these should be considered when planning large-scale land use change. United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 15: Recover sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

### European policy:

#### EU Biodiversity Strategy:

- Halt loss of biodiversity and degradation of ecosystem services by 2020.
- Conserve and restore nature; maintain and enhance ecosystem services; ensure sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries; combat invasive non-native species and address global biodiversity crisis. (Defra, 2011)

There are two key environmental policy changes that are likely to result from a departure from the European Union:

1. A new countryside stewardship policy will be adopted as the UK will not have to follow the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) scheme. This will be called the Environmental Land Management Scheme ('ELMS'). The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) are expected to announce the methodology in 2020. The scheme should reward land managers for good environmental practice.
2. An Office for Environmental Protection may be created to ensure sufficient environmental enforcement and governance for when the UK is no longer covered by European Commission governance. (Environmental Audit Committee, 2018) (Defra, 2019). The extent of the powers of such a committee are yet to be determined and there are concerns that this new watchdog may not have sufficient power or independency to protect the environment.

### Nationally and regionally:

Defra's 25 Year Plan: Sets out the ambition to become first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. There are Biodiversity Strategies for England (Defra, 2011) and Kent (Kent Nature Partnership, 2015) (with a 2019 Kent Biodiversity Strategy under consultation) and this document sits beneath those. Biodiversity strategies replace Local Biodiversity Action Plans – known as LBAPs (Lawton, et al., 2010). It also sits under the Kent Tree Strategy (Butfoy, et al., 2019).

### Locally:

This strategy provides more detail on how to achieve some of the environmental aims from the Maidstone Local Plan (Maidstone Borough Council, 2017) including DM1 6.4: "All new development protects and enhances any on-site biodiversity". It also correlates with the Maidstone Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy. It is designed to be applicable and usable by local people (businesses, schools, community groups, parish councils and individuals,) as well as by Maidstone Borough Council.



## 2. What are the aims of this strategy?

Aims	Reasoning
<b>1. Maintaining and enhancing richness and evenness of biodiversity in Maidstone Borough to ensure provision of ecosystem services.</b>	Biodiversity is essential for provision of services critical to our survival.
<b>2. Raise awareness of the benefits of biodiversity.</b>	Better understanding will lead to better decision-making and change behaviour to result in benefits to biodiversity.
<b>3. Promote the integration of biodiversity into decision-making process across sectors.</b>	Large-scale change is required to make all land more amenable to wildlife and reduce negative impacts.
<b>4. Guide the planning process towards biodiversity-friendly decisions.</b>	Help people understand how to achieve biodiversity gains and prevent harm when planning development.

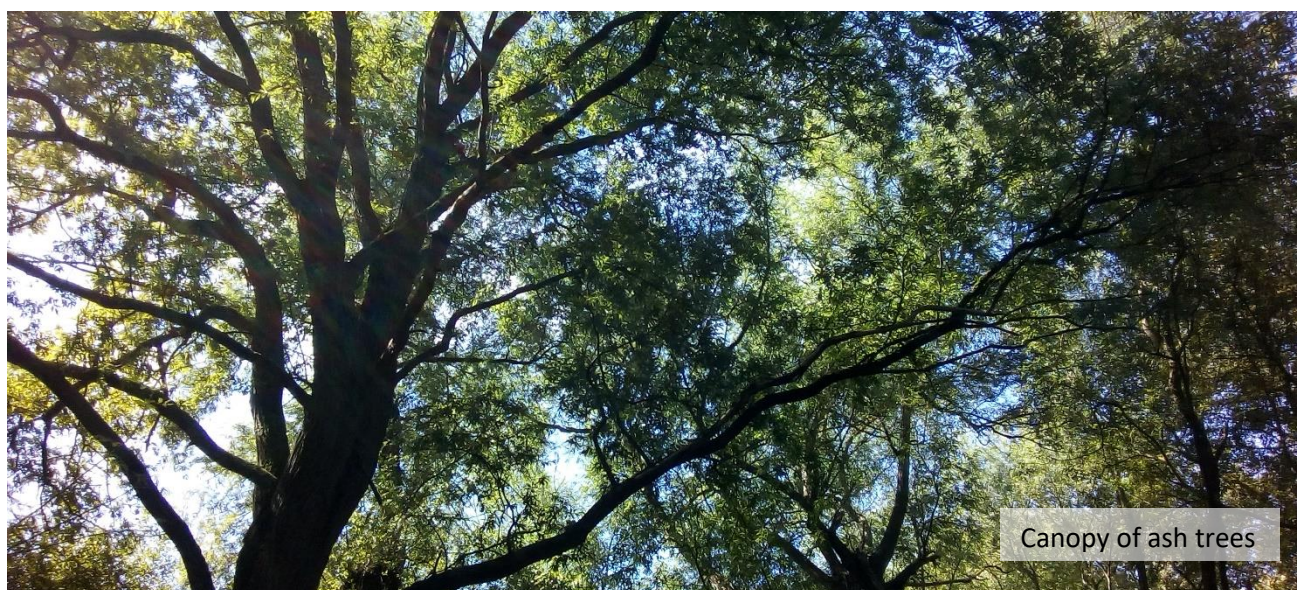
## 3. What are ecosystem services?

Ecosystem services are a key concept to biodiversity management because they show how vital it is to society to keep our ecosystems functioning. Biodiversity underpins ecosystem services (Lawton, et al., 2010) as it contributes to ecosystem health and resilience. It is due to these benefits that both biodiversity and ecosystem services are fundamental to our wellbeing and economy.

Increasing awareness of the importance of nature for society is shown by the focusses on ecosystem services in the Government's Natural Choice White Paper<sup>1</sup> (Defra, 2011), 'Conservation 21' (Natural England' plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Natural England, 2016)), and the ThinkBIG report (England Biodiversity Group, 2011).

### Ecosystem services:

the benefits that humans gain from nature. This includes supporting services (such as soil formation and pollination), provisioning services (such as food and water supply), regulating services (such as improving air quality, flood prevention) and cultural services (such as recreation, education and wellbeing).

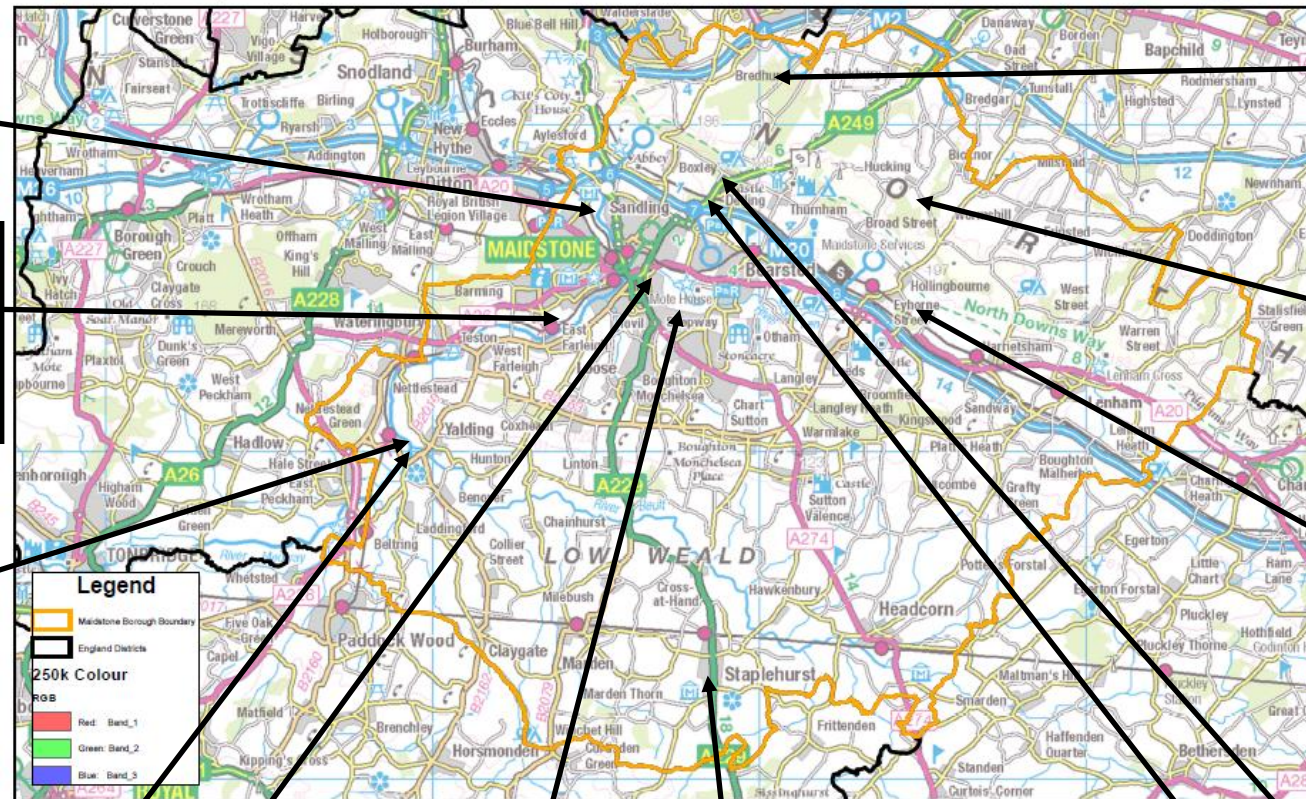


Canopy of ash trees

<sup>1</sup> White papers are policy documents produced by the Government that set out their proposals for future legislation. (UK Parliament, 2019)



## Examples of Ecosystem Services in Maidstone Borough



Whatman Park—  
recreation, air quality

Fant Wildlife Area - greenspace  
in dense urban area benefits  
wellbeing, air quality, slows  
water runoff and prevents  
flooding

Yalding Fen – water storage  
helping to prevent flood, plus  
provisioning services such as  
creation of apple juice from  
traditional orchards

The Lees – hay meadow's  
hay used for music festival,  
flood prevention

River Len LNR – flood storage,  
combatting urban heat island  
effect, carbon sequestration,  
phytoremediation, aesthetics,  
noise barrier, population  
source

Mote Park—provides cultural  
services such sense of place,  
heritage value

Oliver Road Nature Reserve (Wimpey  
Fields) – recreation, air quality,  
Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems  
(SUDS) for water quality and flood  
control

Horish Wood – recreation,  
blackberries, sound barrier,  
carbon sequestration

Bredhurst Woods -  
regulating services  
such as climate  
regulation, carbon  
sequestration

Hucking Wood –  
historical value: ancient  
Drove Road, chalk  
wells, marl pits and  
potential iron-ore

Hollingbourne Meadows -  
wind buffer, community  
cohesion, pollination, air  
quality, recreation

The Larches – supporting  
services such as nutrient  
cycling and soil formation

### 3.1 Declining ecosystem services:

An assessment of the UK's ecosystems was carried out in 2011 and found that 30% of services were in decline (UNEP-WCMC, 2014). They also highlighted that pressure on these services will increase due to increased population size and climate change (UNEP-WCMC, 2014). One of the Convention on Biological Diversity Aichi targets is to restore ecosystem services (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010). The UN's IPBES report highlights how it is imperative to conserve biodiversity in order to maintain human quality of life and survival, and to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Whilst there can be artificial substitutes for these services, e.g. human-engineered water treatment facilities, these often are costly, requiring more costly management and usually fulfil just a single purpose – a woodland provides many benefits all at once. (IPBES, 2019). The Kent Natural Capital Assessment found significant decreases in ecosystem service provision in all categories between 1961 and 2008 (except increase extent of urban areas and enclosed farmland and stable condition in urban areas) (AECOM, 2015).

### 3.2 Nature and Human Health

Thriving nature has been shown to have positive impacts on health (both physical and mental). The Natural Choice White Paper nods to mental and physical health benefits of contact with nature (Defra, 2011) and the Marmot review further demonstrates the link between healthy humans and healthy environments (Marmot, et al., 2010). Nature contributes to human health in various ways: nutritious food, medicines, clean water, regulating disease, reducing air pollutants and improving health through access to natural spaces (IPBES, 2019).

### Nature in crisis = people in crisis

“Nature is essential for human existence and good quality of life.” (IPBES, 2019)

“Natural world, its biodiversity, and its constituent ecosystems are critically important to our wellbeing and economic prosperity but consistently undervalued in conventional economic analyses and decision-making” UK NEA (UNEP-WCMC, 2014)

### Natural capital:

“the components of nature that provide people and the economy with essential goods and services” (The State of Nature partnership, 2016)

### 3.3 Natural Capital

Increasingly, the benefits provided by nature are being incorporated into our economic systems by acknowledging the value of natural capital. By thinking of biodiversity in terms of the financial value we derive from these services, we are more able to incorporate biodiversity management into our economic system. Existing economic systems favour economic activity at a cost to environmental condition (IPBES, 2019) because the financial value of the environment is not accounted for. The contribution of the natural environment to other sectors needs to be acknowledged so that we can begin to protect nature sufficiently. Ecosystem management needs an integrated rather than a sectoral approach (UK NEA (UNEP-WCMC, 2014)).

### Natural Capital Policy

Defra's Natural Choice white paper calls for the inclusion of natural capital in national accounts. Biodiversity 2020 (England's Biodiversity Strategy) also sets out their plans for an Ecosystem Markets Taskforce and New Natural Capital Committee. The report 'Enabling the Transition to a Green Economy' highlights the economic advantages of being environmentally friendly (Defra, 2011). An online tool for natural capital and sustainable management of natural resources is under development by the University of Exeter, (Natural Environment Valuation Online (University of Exeter, 2018)). For more detail please see the Kent Natural Capital Asset Check (AECOM, 2015).

## 4. What are the pressures on wildlife in Maidstone Borough?

The Kent Habitat Survey highlights the key negative drivers for biodiversity: pressure on land use (due to proximity to London and transport links to Europe), direct loss of habitats to development or mineral extraction, intensive management, inappropriate management, habitat fragmentation, invasive non-native species and climate change (ARCH, 2012). These correlate with the drivers at a global scale addressed in the recent UN report on biodiversity (IPBES, 2019). Pressures on individual habitats and areas are discussed in section 8.

### 4.1 Development

Maidstone borough has strong pressure to meet housing targets. The Local Plan suggests a need to create 883 dwellings/year until 2031 (Maidstone Borough Council, 2017). The provision of housing to meet demand is necessary but needs to be done in a way that does not cost us our nature.

For more guidance on writing a neighbourhood plan, submitting a planning application or if you are a planner, please see Appendix A.

#### Erosion of biodiversity

“Small losses of habitat at a development scale add up to significant rates of biodiversity loss overall.” (Defra, 2018).

New development is the main cause of woodland loss (Butfoy, et al., 2019) in Kent. Development (domestic, industrial and infrastructure) is also a key cause of habitat fragmentation. Isolated habitats support less wildlife due to limited dispersal opportunities and edge effects. Fragmentation is a key issue at Maidstone borough sites such as Horish Wood and Chilston Ponds which are isolated due to HS1, M20 and other roads.

There is a strong need for integration of conservation into all stages of the development process – including architects, builders, planners, town planners and homeowners. Doing so can improve outcomes for all – and make our lives healthier, more sustainable, and improve quality of life. Marmot calls for integration of planning, transport, housing, environmental and health systems to address social determiners of health (Marmot, et al., 2010). In the Natural Choice white paper, Defra also call for factoring of urban greenspace into development of all communities and acknowledges the health benefits from contact with nature.

There are increasing numbers of case studies of developers and conservation working together.

- A recent example is of the Kingsbrook development where developers, RSPB and the local council have worked together to provide wildlife-friendly housing. More information can be found here: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/projects/kingsbrook-housing/> (RSPB, 2019)
- The Exeter City Council’s nationally acclaimed Residential Design Guide includes a section of the provision of biodiversity in new development. See Appendix 2: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4CpCORTOQdTRTNySENnUXdoNTQ/view> (Exeter City Council, 2010)
- Oxford City Council have produced a Technical Advice Note on Biodiversity to guide developers, planning applicants and planners on how to make space for nature within developments: [https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/5730/grs4 - \\_technical\\_advice\\_note\\_-\\_biodiversity](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/5730/grs4_-_technical_advice_note_-_biodiversity) (Oxford City Council, 2019)



## Net Biodiversity Gain

Defra<sup>1</sup> underwent a consultation in 2018 on Net Biodiversity Gain in development. Introducing a net gain principle will mean that new development will have to result in an overall increase in biodiversity, as measured by a metric developed by Defra. The consultation document suggests that the current planning system protects the best sites for nature but is less good at reducing “gradual erosion of lower value habitats” (Defra, 2018). The biodiversity net gain principle will be mandated through the upcoming Environment Bill, due to be published in 2019 (draft Bill is available, (Defra, 2019)). The England Biodiversity Group’s report ThinkBIG also supports this view (England Biodiversity Group, 2011).

## Maidstone Local Plan statements on biodiversity and development

The Maidstone Local Plan says “Development schemes will be expected to contribute towards improved connectivity through the provision of space for nature that contributes to the large landscape-scale pattern of connected habitat”

- Biodiversity: 6.20:
  - Council will work in partnership with landowners, land managers and developers to encourage better soil handling practices to avoid the degradation of soil and ensure soil functions are maintained as appropriate
  - Develop proposals need initial survey of on-site assets at appropriate time of year for the relevant habitats / species / flora and fauna
  - Developers must ensure suitable mitigation measures are implemented if harm unavoidable
  - Proposals should seek to avoid damaging and fragmenting existing habitats
  - Maximise opportunities to contribute to priority habitats and species
  - Development likely to lead to negative effect of international important nature conservation sites unlikely to meet requirements of habitats directive

(Maidstone Borough Council, 2017)



Field of orchids

## 4.2 Pollution

Pollution affects the quality of air, water and soil, and thereby can interfere with ecosystem services and reduce biodiversity. Changes can be diffuse and wide-reaching, and difficult to tackle.

Upper Stone Street in Maidstone town was found to be the 5<sup>th</sup> worst site (outside London) for breaching the Air Quality Objective for Nitrogen Dioxide, with 79.3 ug/m<sup>3</sup> compared to the objective of below 40ug/m<sup>3</sup> (Friends of the Earth, 2019).

The Catchment Sensitive Farming scheme works on reducing water and air pollution and offers free support to those in high priority areas. In Maidstone borough, this is along the M20 and near Boxley. (Natural England, 2018)

Biodiversity suffers from pollution but can also be part of the solution. Biodiverse systems can help to reduce damage through phytoremediation (the process of plants and associated micro-organisms removing hazardous contaminants from soil, air and water).

### Pollution:

The presence or introduction of a harmful substance into the environment.

To find out where the high priority areas are, visit this webpage (Natural England, Defra and Environment Agency, 2019):  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/catchment-sensitive-farming-reduce-agricultural-water-pollution#find-out-if-your-lands-in-a-high-priority-area>

## Pollution in Policy

The government's Water White Paper highlights the issue of diffuse pollution (Defra, 2011). The Convention on Biological Diversity Aichi target 8 is Reducing pollution to levels not detrimental to ecosystem functions and biodiversity (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010). The Maidstone Local Plan includes controlling pollution for the benefit of biodiversity in DM3 The Natural Environment, and in relation to Air Quality in DM6 which recommends the use of soft measures such as tree planting to mitigate against emissions from new developments (Maidstone Borough Council, 2017).

## 4.3 Climate crisis

The current climate crisis is a series of human-caused changes in our environment which are having large-scale negative consequences for the planet and for society. Humans are estimated to have caused an observed warming of approximately 1.0°C between pre-industrial levels and 2017. For global temperature increases of 1.5°C to 2°C, most terrestrial species are projected to shrink profoundly (IPBES, 2019).

Biodiversity is at threat from the climate crisis so we need to manage biodiversity with climate resilience in mind (see Recommendation 13 of (Lawton, et al., 2010)).

Rapid changes to the climate affect wildlife in lots of ways – it affects their habitat availability, their geographical ranges, the timing of biological events and the ecosystem processes upon which biodiversity depends. (Lawton, et al., 2010). These effects exacerbate the other threats to biodiversity. The way in which it affects human society is comparable – loss of homes, suitable land, food availability.

At a global level, the Convention on Biological Diversity Aichi targets include increasing ecosystem resilience to mitigate against climate change. (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010). Similarly, the UN's IPBES report highlights the importance of taking climate change into account in actions to reduce the loss of biodiversity. The Kent Habitat Survey identifies climate change as a key negative driver (ARCH, 2012).

Working across sectors can produce synergistic outcomes: reduced climate change, increased biodiversity, stable economy and increased human health and wellbeing. The Marmot review investigated Health Inequalities in England and suggested prioritising policies and interventions that mitigate climate change alongside reducing health inequalities, such as increasing availability of good quality green space across social gradients (Marmot, et al., 2010).

The management plans of wildlife sites rarely include managing for climate resilience. The Making Space for Nature report recommends that conservation objectives of wildlife sites are revised to respond to climate change (through measures such increased microhabitat diversity, focus on connectivity and supporting ecological processes) (Lawton, et al., 2010).

In the Habitat sections below, these negative climate changes are not listed as threats under each habitat type as the effects are likely to be across all habitats and often there are no/inadequate predictions of how the habitats will be affected.

Biodiversity is also part of the solution – ecosystem services include climate regulation and biosequestration. Plants take in carbon dioxide from the air and use the carbon in the production of more plant material. This natural process of carbon sequestration can help to mitigate global temperature increases. The Kent Tree Strategy which explains how trees can counter urban heat island effect and climate-proof built-up areas (Butfoy, et al., 2019). At a local level, the Maidstone Local Plan calls for greening of the town centre to mitigate against impacts of climate change. (Maidstone Borough Council, 2017).

#### 4.4 Invasive Non-Native Species

As well as being problematic to us directly, invasive non-native species are a key threat to biodiversity by altering habitats or competing for resources and land, resulting in decreased native biodiversity. Globally, there has been an estimated 70% increase in the number of INNS since 1970 (IPBES, 2019).

#### Invasive Non-Native Species:

Species which have been introduced from outside their original distribution and have the ability to spread and cause damage to the environment, economy, our health or the way we live (Griffiths & Loos, 2018).



The global biodiversity targets (from the Convention on Biological Diversity) include identifying and prioritising invasive non-native species and pathways, controlling or eradicating those priority species and putting measures in place to prevent their introduction and establishment (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010).

### Invasive Non-Native Species in Maidstone borough

The South East's Regional Invasive Alien Species Management Plan shows the regional pathways of introduction, hotspots, areas of high conservation value and key stakeholders. It provides recommendations on prevention, early warning, rapid response, eradication and control of INNS. (Griffiths & Loos, 2018). The hotspots and key species of relevance to Maidstone borough are highlighted below.

	Area	Species of concern
<b>Regional Sites of High Conservation:</b>	River Beult	Water Fern, Floating Pennywort, Giant Hogweed, Himalayan balsam
	Kent Downs	Various
	High Weald	Various
<b>Regional High Risk Areas:</b>	River Medway Navigation and Canoe Trail	Various
	Yalding/River Medway	Floating Pennywort
<b>Regional Hotspots:</b>	River Medway through Yalding	Giant Hogweed, Himalayan balsam and floating pennywort

Table 1: Regions of concern in Maidstone borough (Griffiths & Loos, 2018)

Species in Freshwater Medway area	Non-aquatic species in Medway area
Alpine Newt	Asian hornet
Curly waterweed	Asian long-horn beetle
Pickerel-weed	Few Flowered Leek
Piri-piri burr	Indian House Crow
Prickly heath	Monk parakeet
Quagga mussel	Invasive Garden Ant
Red swamp crayfish	New Zealand Flatworm
Spiny-cheek crayfish	Prickly heath
Virile crayfish	

Table 2: Black list species: high concern, not currently present (Griffiths & Loos, 2018)



## Invasive Non-Native Species in Maidstone borough

Species in Freshwater Medway area
American skunk cabbage
Caspian Mud Shrimp
Water primrose

Table 3: Red list species: early detection – present but not well established (Griffiths & Loos, 2018)

Species in Freshwater Medway area	Non-aquatic species in Medway area
American mink	Goat's-rue
Water fern	
Zebra mussel	
Chinese mitten crab	
Signal crayfish	
Floating pennywort	
Goat's-rue	
Giant hogweed	
Giant rhubarb	
Himalayan balsam	
Japanese knotweed	
Marsh frog	
Turkish crayfish	
New Zealand pigmyweed	
Nuttall's and Canadian waterweed	
Orange balsam	
Parrot's feather	

Table 4: Yellow red list: long term management - eradication not feasible



Non-aquatic species in Medway area
<i>Buddleia davidii</i>
Ring necked parakeets
Rhododendron
Russian vine
Sika deer
Turkey oak
Reeves Mutjac
Montbresia
Japanese rose
Cotoneaster sp.
Evergreen oak
Grey squirrel
False acacia

Table 5: Green list species: lower impact species, often where very long-term management required (Griffiths & Loos, 2018)

#### 4.5 Intensive Agriculture

Modern intensive farming methods have a profound effect on the landscape – impacting the appearance, character and ecological condition of the countryside. Intensive agriculture can include increasing output by farming larger fields with the same crop and methods, using large-scale application of fertilisers and pesticides, changing natural water flows (through drainage ditches, extraction of water from rivers), and a reduction in the diversity of crops, livestock breeds, and techniques. The increase in agriculture and its intensification has led to decreases in other ecosystem services, such as regulation of air and water quality, climate regulation and habitat provision. (IPBES, 2019)

In England, 60% of nitrates and 40% of phosphates within water are due to agriculture which compromises important habitats and thus species richness (Natural England, 2009). Within the south east, water usage within agriculture may become an increasingly pressing issue as the area is already ‘water stressed’ as a result of reduced rainfall and increased consumer need. 87% of ammonia emission with the UK are from farming in particular livestock farms through intensive farming this increases and decreased the air and water quality (Natural England, 2019).

Loss of local varieties of crops and breeds of livestock threaten global food security as we rely on less species and on genetically diverse species. This reduces the resilience of our food systems to pests, disease and climate change. (IPBES, 2019)

Defra’s Natural Choice white paper sets out the aim to deliver sustainable management of England’s soils, and tackle key threats, which will be delivered through stewardship schemes and cross compliance. (Defra, 2011). The full extent of the impacts of agriculture on biodiversity, and the work being done to tackle this, is beyond the scope of this strategy, especially as it largely falls out of the responsibility of Maidstone Borough Council, however it’s worth noting the importance of agricultural practices for biodiversity management,

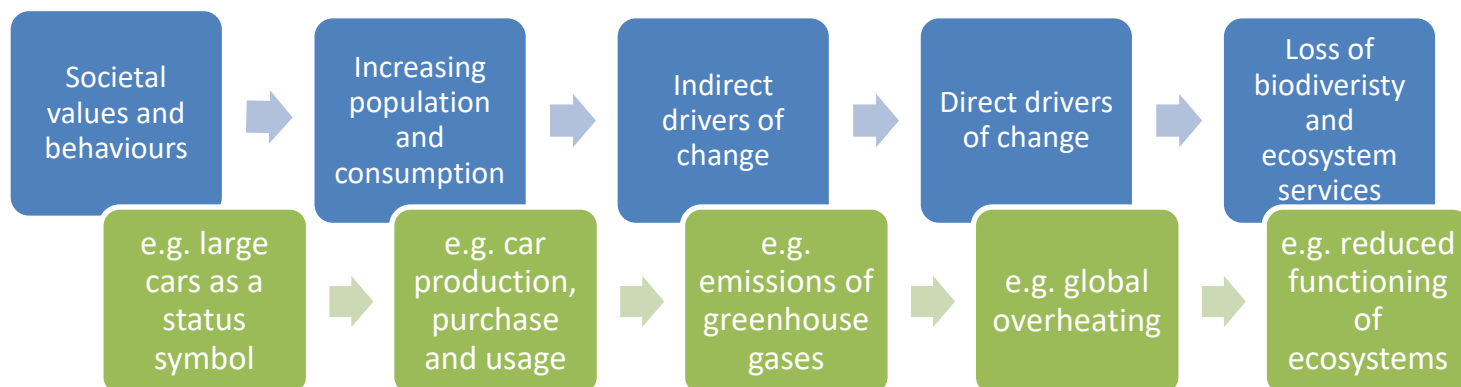
especially as the majority of land in Maidstone Borough is agricultural (73% arable and horticulture and improved grassland).

Several projects exist to support environmentally friendly farming, including Back from the Brink's Colour in the Margins project which protects arable habitats and species, with the Kent Downs as a focus area for the project. LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) are also working on increasing the environmental suitability of farmland. LEAF promotes integrated farm management, certifies sustainably farmed products and provides education. Further information can be found on environmentally friendly practices such as soil management, pollution control and nature conservation on the LEAF website, especially on their resources page: <https://leafuk.org/farming/resources>. The Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative focuses on water and air quality in the farmed environment – please see section 4.2 for more detail.

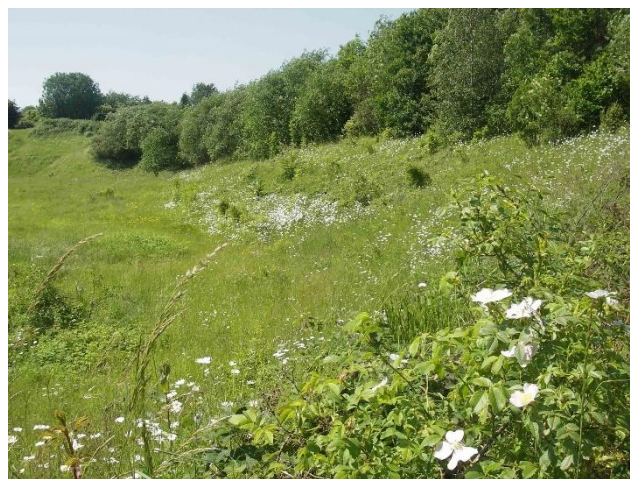
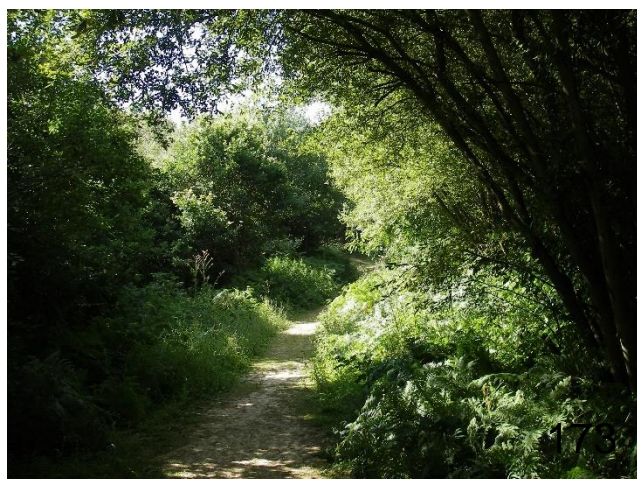
Find out more about Colour in the Margins here:  
<https://naturebftb.co.uk/the-projects/colour-in-the-margins/>  
Or for information on LEAF, visit:  
<https://leafuk.org/>

#### 4.6 Underlying drivers

The factors above are all underpinned by increasing population and increasing consumption patterns. Human population has doubled since 1950 and global economy has grown nearly 4-fold. (IPBES, 2019). The quantity of resources extracted from the environment has nearly doubled since 1980 due to increases in per person consumption and increasing population. (IPBES, 2019)



The UN biodiversity report stresses the need to decouple idea of a good and meaningful life from ever-increasing material consumption. (IPBES, 2019). To achieve the large-scale changes in our environment that are required, our societal values and behaviours need to change.





Woodland ride

Field and hedgerow

## 5. How can I help?

Biodiversity 2020 (England's Biodiversity Strategy) prioritises putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy, including increasing awareness and increasing the number of people taking positive actions (Defra, 2011). As discussed in Section 2, not only is it important to look after protected areas where nature is the priority, but also to "soften the matrix" and make the wider landscape more hospitable to nature. This requires people across sectors to get involved and take responsibility for their impacts on nature. Everyone can contribute in some way – in fact, it's vital that we can get as many people taking positive actions as possible.

### Role for everyone

As the ThinkBIG report points out, "irrespective of ability, everyone can do something, whether as an individual community, organisation or business" (England Biodiversity Group, 2011).

### 5.1 Maidstone Biodiversity Pledge

To encourage local people and organisations in Maidstone to get involved, we have developed the Maidstone Biodiversity Pledge. To sign up to the pledge, you are saying that you support the Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy and will take action to help biodiversity. [You can sign up via a webpage on the Maidstone Borough Council website.](#) This will help people to know which businesses and organisations support nature and we hope it will foster intersectional partnership working.

If you are interested in what Maidstone Borough Council will do, please see Section 6.

You can sign up at one of three levels: as a Nature Ally, Nature Supporter or Nature Guardian depending on your scope to instigate change. Saving nature requires everyone to take responsibility for their impacts on the environment and take steps to change – there are actions that everyone can take.

There are three areas of action which we encourage people to take: considering biodiversity in decision-making, increasing awareness, and giving wildlife a home – the table below gives examples of how these actions can be done.

This pledge should be taken as an opportunity to examine your opportunities to help nature, not an opportunity for greenwashing. Changing to a more environmentally friendly supplier of toilet cleaner may not help your reputation as much putting up a window box with insect friendly flowers but may make a greater difference to your impact on nature.

### Greenwash:

To make people believe your company is doing more to protect the environment than it really is. (Cambridge Dictionary)

If you are putting in a planning application, work in the built environment sector (architecture, development, building and planning) or are a planner please see the Biodiversity in the Planning Process guidance document, found in Appendix A, which looks in more detail about how development and nature can be balanced, including details of legal requirements and advice on best practice.

If you are involved with a parish council that is working on a Neighbourhood Plan, please incorporate the advice and information given in this strategy and Appendix A.

3 Levels of Commitment				
Maidstone Biodiversity Pledge – levels and actions		<b>Nature Ally</b> e.g. individuals, local businesses	<b>Nature Supporter</b> e.g. parish councils, local community organisations	<b>Nature Guardian</b> e.g. environmental organisations, MBC councillors
3 Areas of Action	<b>Think about biodiversity in decision-making</b>	<i>e.g. consider the impact of food shopping</i>	<i>e.g. include biodiversity in your business plan</i>	<i>e.g. having a dedicated biodiversity policy</i>
	<b>Engagement and education</b>	<i>e.g. attending a talk or event, take part in a campaign</i>	<i>e.g. promote or support events</i>	<i>e.g. run events, educating staff</i>
	<b>Giving wildlife a home</b>	<i>e.g. putting up a bird-box, window box with bee-friendly flowers</i>	<i>e.g. make an office wildlife garden</i>	<i>e.g. manage protected areas</i>



## 5.2 Funding Sources

Funding is often a big challenge for those wanting to help nature. Whilst the financial value of nature is increasingly recognised, and systems to incorporate nature into the economic system are built, there is still a way to go. Consultations with local conservation groups have shown that identifying funding sources are a key challenge so the following information has been compiled. This is not an exhaustive list as funding sources come and go and are often time limited.

It may be beneficial for smaller organisations to group together in order to tap into funding from larger grant-making bodies. See Section 5.4 for other local groups interested in partnership working.

Scale	Name/description	Contact or website
Borough	Maidstone Borough Council Community Infrastructure Levy - money paid by developers to fund infrastructure schemes necessary to support development proposed in Local Plan (Maidstone Borough Council, 2017) Plan for spending of this money is outlined in the Maidstone Infrastructure Delivery Plan (Maidstone Borough Council, 2016) and will commence in 2020	Check with AW
	Maidstone Borough Council Section 106 money - Open space is the 3 <sup>rd</sup> highest priority for both residential development and business development to spend S106 money on (Maidstone Borough Council, 2017)	Check with AW
	Maidstone Borough Council's Go Green Go Wild Small Grants Scheme	<a href="http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/home/other-services/communities-and-volunteering/tier-2-primary-areas/go-green-go-wild#go_green_go_wild_small_grants_scheme">http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/home/other-services/communities-and-volunteering/tier-2-primary-areas/go-green-go-wild#go_green_go_wild_small_grants_scheme</a>
Kent	Kent County Council's 'Inside Track' - Newsletter of funding opportunities	<a href="https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/community-grants-and-funding/inside-track-newsletter">https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/community-grants-and-funding/inside-track-newsletter</a>
	Kent Community Foundation - funding for local charities	<a href="https://kentcf.org.uk/funding?dm_i=1REE,6DDDF,K4A764,P7HX6,1">https://kentcf.org.uk/funding?dm_i=1REE,6DDDF,K4A764,P7HX6,1</a>
	Kent County Council grants for small business to be more environmentally friendly	<a href="https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/Facts-and-figures-about-Kent/environmental-policies/council-environmental-targets-and-performance/initiatives">https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/Facts-and-figures-about-Kent/environmental-policies/council-environmental-targets-and-performance/initiatives</a>
	Kent Mammal Group Grants 2019	<a href="https://www.kentmammalgroup.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&amp;view=article&amp;id=136:kmg-">https://www.kentmammalgroup.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&amp;view=article&amp;id=136:kmg-</a>

		<a href="#">grants&amp;catid=45:notice-board&amp;Itemid=85</a>
National	Defra rural development programme	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rural-development-programme-for-england-leader-funding">https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rural-development-programme-for-england-leader-funding</a>
	Defra flood and coastal risk management funding	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/funding-for-flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-in-england">https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/funding-for-flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-in-england</a>
	National Lottery Heritage Fund	<a href="https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding">https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding</a>
	National Lottery Community Fund	e.g. Awards for All <a href="https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/national-lottery-awards-for-all-england">https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/national-lottery-awards-for-all-england</a> e.g. Partnership fund <a href="https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/partnerships-england">https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/partnerships-england</a>
	Supermarket token schemes which can provide grants to local initiatives	e.g. Waitrose Community Matters <a href="https://www.waitrose.com/content/waitrose/en/home/inspiration/community_matters.html">https://www.waitrose.com/content/waitrose/en/home/inspiration/community_matters.html</a> , e.g. Tesco Bags of Help community grants <a href="https://www.groundwork.org.uk/Sites/tescocommunityscheme/pages/Category/the-tesco-bags-of-help-programme-tes2">https://www.groundwork.org.uk/Sites/tescocommunityscheme/pages/Category/the-tesco-bags-of-help-programme-tes2</a>
	Natural England funded schemes such as Reptile Mitigation Sites or Great Crested Newt Pond creation	For Great Crested Newt District Licensing Enquiries: <a href="mailto:gcnidl@naturalengland.org.uk">gcnidl@naturalengland.org.uk</a>
	Southern Water	<a href="https://www.southernwater.co.uk/working-with-conservation-groups">https://www.southernwater.co.uk/working-with-conservation-groups</a>
	People's Postcode Lottery	<a href="http://www.postcodetrust.org.uk/applying-for-a-grant">http://www.postcodetrust.org.uk/applying-for-a-grant</a>
	ELMS/Countryside Stewardship Schemes	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-get-paid-for-environmental-land-management">https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-get-paid-for-environmental-land-management</a>
	List of funders on the Environmental Funders Network	<a href="https://www.greenfunders.org/seeking-funding/">https://www.greenfunders.org/seeking-funding/</a>
	Urban Tree Challenge Fund - funding of £10 million from HM Treasury for planting at least 20,000 large trees and 110,000 small trees in urban areas in England	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/guidance/urban-tree-challenge-fund">https://www.gov.uk/guidance/urban-tree-challenge-fund</a>
European	Forestry Commission Woodland Creation Grant scheme	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/guidance/create-woodland-overview">https://www.gov.uk/guidance/create-woodland-overview</a>
	EU LIFE programme	<a href="https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/section/life/life-environment-sub-programme">https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/section/life/life-environment-sub-programme</a>

## 5.3 Advice and Information Sources

Maidstone Borough Council	Parks Department on: Telephone: 01622 602747 Email: <a href="mailto:parksandopenspaces@maidstone.gov.uk">parksandopenspaces@maidstone.gov.uk</a> <b>Other MBC staff contacts!</b>
Medway Valley Countryside Partnership - not-for-profit organisation that works on habitat management and community engagement, part of the Kent County Council's Countryside Management Partnership network	<a href="https://medwayvalley.org/">https://medwayvalley.org/</a>
Maidstone Local Plan – Planning Evidence documents in Natural & Historic Environment section including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landscape Character Assessment 2012 provides guidance on management of the local landscape types</li> <li>• Landscape Character Assessment Supplement 2012 - has planting lists for each character type.</li> <li>• Maidstone Ancient Wood Inventory 2012</li> <li>• Open Space Audit 2014</li> <li>• Quality Audit 2015</li> <li>• Maps of open space 2015</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/home/primary-services/planning-and-building/primary-areas/local-plan-information/tier-3-primary-areas/planning-payments">http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/home/primary-services/planning-and-building/primary-areas/local-plan-information/tier-3-primary-areas/planning-payments</a>
Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty team - features the Kent Land Managers' pack	<a href="https://www.kentdowns.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/">https://www.kentdowns.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/</a>
Kent Wildlife Trust	<a href="https://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/contact-us">https://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/contact-us</a>
Kent Landscape Information System Map - contains map layers with access, habitat opportunities, habitat surveys, landscape character, physical environment and designated areas	<a href="https://webapps.kent.gov.uk/KCC.KLIS.Web.Sites.Public/ViewMap.aspx">https://webapps.kent.gov.uk/KCC.KLIS.Web.Sites.Public/ViewMap.aspx</a>
Kent Historic Environment Record - map layers with access to a database of 40,000 archaeological discoveries and 18,000 listed buildings, landscapes, excavations and library sources	<a href="https://webapps.kent.gov.uk/KCC.ExploringKentsPast.Web.Sites.Public/SingleResult.aspx?uid=TKE1046">https://webapps.kent.gov.uk/KCC.ExploringKentsPast.Web.Sites.Public/SingleResult.aspx?uid=TKE1046</a>
Catchment Sensitive Farming – provides advice, training and grant support for farmers and land-managers to reduce water and air pollution from agriculture.	Free support is available for those in high priority areas (these can found using MAGiC map <a href="https://magic.Defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx">https://magic.Defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx</a> ) which in the Maidstone area applies to an area of land along the M20 near Boxley. The CSF Local Catchment Officer for the Medway is James Woodward ( <a href="mailto:james.woodward@naturalengland.org.uk">james.woodward@naturalengland.org.uk</a> )
Back from the Brink's conservation projects	Colour in the Margins project for arable land, especially on the Kent Downs <a href="https://naturebftb.co.uk/the-projects/colour-in-the-margins/">https://naturebftb.co.uk/the-projects/colour-in-the-margins/</a> Outreach Officer: <a href="mailto:Zoe.Morrall@plantlife.org.uk">Zoe.Morrall@plantlife.org.uk</a>
Linking Environment and Farming	Information, resource and guidance on nature-friendly farming <a href="https://leafuk.org/">https://leafuk.org/</a>
The Woodland Trust - two major outreach programmes	Woodland creation: Large scale planting on private land



	<a href="https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/large-scale/">https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/large-scale/</a>
	Ancient woodland restoration: <a href="https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/about-us/ancient-woodland-restoration/advice-and-support/">https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/about-us/ancient-woodland-restoration/advice-and-support/</a>
Environment Agency	For work relating to rivers and water quality <a href="mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk">enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk</a> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency</a>
Natural England	For work on protected species or sites <a href="https://www.gov.uk/topic/planning-development/protected-sites-species">https://www.gov.uk/topic/planning-development/protected-sites-species</a> and Countryside Stewardship <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-get-paid-for-environmental-land-management">https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-get-paid-for-environmental-land-management</a> and information on Biodiversity Net Gain <a href="http://nepubprod.appspot.com/publication/5850908674228224">http://nepubprod.appspot.com/publication/5850908674228224</a>
MAGiC Map - useful mapping tool made by Defra for the UK	<a href="https://magic.Defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx">https://magic.Defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx</a>
Ecosystem Knowledge Network for advice and events on natural environment	<a href="https://ecosystemsknowledge.net/">https://ecosystemsknowledge.net/</a>
Guidance on river restorations	<a href="https://www.therrc.co.uk/manual-river-restoration-techniques">https://www.therrc.co.uk/manual-river-restoration-techniques</a>
Green Infrastructure Partnership - produces newsletters and promotes opportunities relating to green infrastructure, overcoming environmental challenges and supporting biodiversity through planning and development.	<a href="https://www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/category/green-infrastructure-partnership">https://www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/category/green-infrastructure-partnership</a>

#### 5.4 Partnership Working

There are many brilliant individuals and organisations in the borough working on conservation projects in their area. Working in partnership will allow increased potential for habitat connectivity across the borough.

The following organisations have expressed an interest in partnership working:

- Bredhurst Woodland Action Group
- Boughton Monchelsea Amenity Trust
- Detling Parish Council
- Fant Wildlife Group
- Friends of Whatman Park
- Harrietsham Parish Council
- Hollingbourne Meadows Trust
- Kent Wildlife Trust
- Maidstone Green Drinks group
- Medway Valley Countryside Partnership
- Woodland Trust
- Yalding Parish Council

## 6. What will Maidstone Borough Council do?

To meet the council's commitments to biodiversity, as set out in the Local Plan and here, the Council will do the following:

- Follow up planning permissions granted with environmental conditions to ensure mitigation is done properly and managed for the long term.
- No longer permit greenfield residential developments that do not meet ANGSt standards. Brownfield residential development will have to meet financial contributions to provide off-site provision and maintenance of natural open space.
- Enforce Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan's DM3 6.20 in planning decision (see planners' guidance note).
- Make habitat connectivity and ecosystem function a primary factor when allocating land for development.
- Reject plans that do not deliver net gain for biodiversity. Government will enforce a net gain for biodiversity and subsequently also a net gain for environment (incorporating biodiversity, air quality etc). Guidance on measuring net gain can be found here:  
<http://nepubprod.appspot.com/publication/5850908674228224>
- Prioritise ecological solutions (soft measures such as tree planting and Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes - SUDS) as the primary mechanism to deal with problems such as climate and/or flood mitigation, or preventing run-off pollution events, as these are more likely to provide multiple benefits.
- Prohibit all development on ancient woodland or any tier 1 or 2 designated sites.
- Implement Hedgerow Regulations to protect hedgerows
- Manage its land with biodiversity and ecosystem services as the priority and follow principles set out through-out this document including:
  - Stop using rodenticide
  - Stop removing ivy unless where a safety concern
  - Reducing mowing and increase diversity on monoculture amenity grassland
- Consider biodiversity and ecosystem services in other plans within other Maidstone Borough Council departments – e.g. health, air quality, education, economy etc.
- Permanent investment (i.e. beyond the Go Green Go Wild project) in supporting regions' biodiversity and community environmental groups.
- Implementation plan yearly to demonstrate how the council will enact the recommendations of this strategy. Yearly monitoring and reporting to MBC committee.
- Ensure that canals, railways, roads, cycle ways and other linear features in the landscape should better achieve their potential to be wildlife corridors (Lawton, et al., 2010)
- The Maidstone Infrastructure Delivery Plan has a section on health infrastructure which currently is focused on provision of GP surgeries and local care services – future iterations of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan should include the provision of greenspace to the communities that need it most. (Maidstone Borough Council, 2016))

## 7. What have we got in Maidstone?

England has species and habitats of international importance (Lawton, et al., 2010).

Those present in Maidstone include:

- More chalk rivers than any other country in Europe
- Globally important populations of bats and oceanic lichens
- More than half mainland Europe's species of mosses
- 10% of the world's bumblebee species!
- Highest representation of veteran oaks in Europe
- Hay meadows and chalk grassland of international importance

### 7.1 Designated sites

As highlighted throughout this strategy, saving nature requires not just focusing on protected areas, but ensuring the wider environment is more habitable for nature. Sympathetic management of all land is critical to reducing drivers of biodiversity loss. Both 'Conservation 21' (Natural England, 2016) and 'Think BIG' (England Biodiversity Group, 2011) stressed the need for large scale change at the landscape level, not just focussing on individual sites.

Nonetheless, well-managed designated sites are key areas that provide space for wildlife. Globally, protected areas cover 15% of terrestrial and freshwater environments (IPBES, 2019)

There are many types of designation (and associated acronyms!). These can be sorted into three levels (as done in the Making Space for Nature review (Lawton, et al., 2010)). To make our ecological network more coherent and resilient, we need to particularly improve the management of the Tier 2 and 3 sites (Lawton, et al., 2010). In Maidstone, 0.1% of the borough is designated as Sites of Specific Scientific Interest, 6.1% are designated as Local Wildlife Sites<sup>2</sup> and 27.6% falls within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



Common spotted orchids

Tier	Type of Site		Number of sites in borough	Total area in borough (to nearest whole hectare)
1	Sites with nature conservation as the primary purpose <sup>3</sup>	Sites of Specific Scientific Interest - SSSIs	11	270
		Ramsar	0	0
		Special Areas for Conservation - SACs	1	137
		Special Protection Areas - SPAs	0	0
		National Nature Reserves - NNRs	0	0
		Local Nature Reserves - LNRs <sup>4</sup>	3	117
2	Sites designated for high biodiversity but without full statutory protection	Local Wildlife Sites - LWSs	63	2398
		Ancient Woodland (Sansum, et al., 2012)	564 woodland parcels	2828
3	Sites where wildlife is included in statutory purpose	Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – AONBs	1 – Kent Downs <sup>5</sup>	10,725
		National Parks	0	0



<sup>3</sup> Excludes NGO-owned sites such as RSPB reserves, National Trust reserves, Woodland Trust sites and Wildlife Trust sites. These are included in Tier 1 in the Lawton review but excluded here due to data availability.

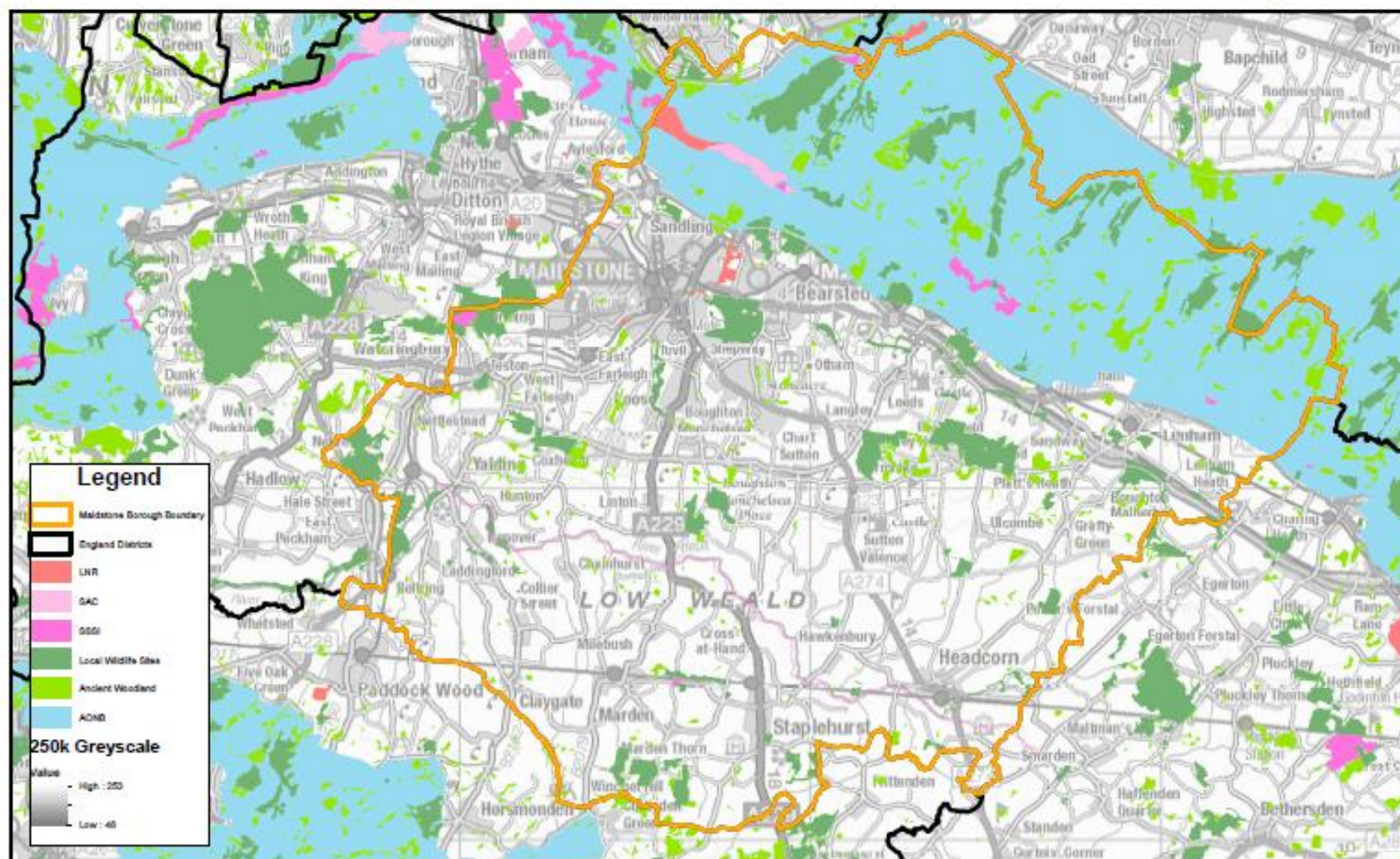
<sup>4</sup> Currently, investigations are being undertaken into designating more sites as Local Nature Reserves. This is due to be announced in October, by Maidstone Borough Council.

<sup>5</sup> A government review into the UK's AONBs is currently in progress – due for publication this year, this may make the Greensand Ridge into a further AONB. (Maidstone Borough Council, 2018)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-landscapes-national-parks-and-aonbs-2018-review#history>



## Sites Designated for Nature in Maidstone Borough



Sites Designated for Nature:

Tier One sites: SSSI (fuschia), SAC (light pink), LNR (coral).

Tier Two sites: LWS (dark green) and Ancient Woodland (light green).

Tier Three sites: AONB (light blue)



## 7.2 Natural Open Space Provision in Maidstone Borough

The quantity of natural open space, split by ward, can be found in the Open Space Audit (Maidstone Borough Council, 2014) including provision per 1000 people. The provision per 1000 people is very unequal. Boxley ward has 537,380m<sup>2</sup> natural open space per 1000 people whereas High Street Ward has 895m<sup>2</sup> per 1000 people. This is largely understandable due to the differences in land pressure between urban and rural locations. However, an issue is that new developments can avoid contributing to the area of open space available, instead paying a contribution to the maintenance of existing open space. Whilst it is beneficial to fund maintenance of existing sites, this can lead to a continual erosion of the availability of open space.

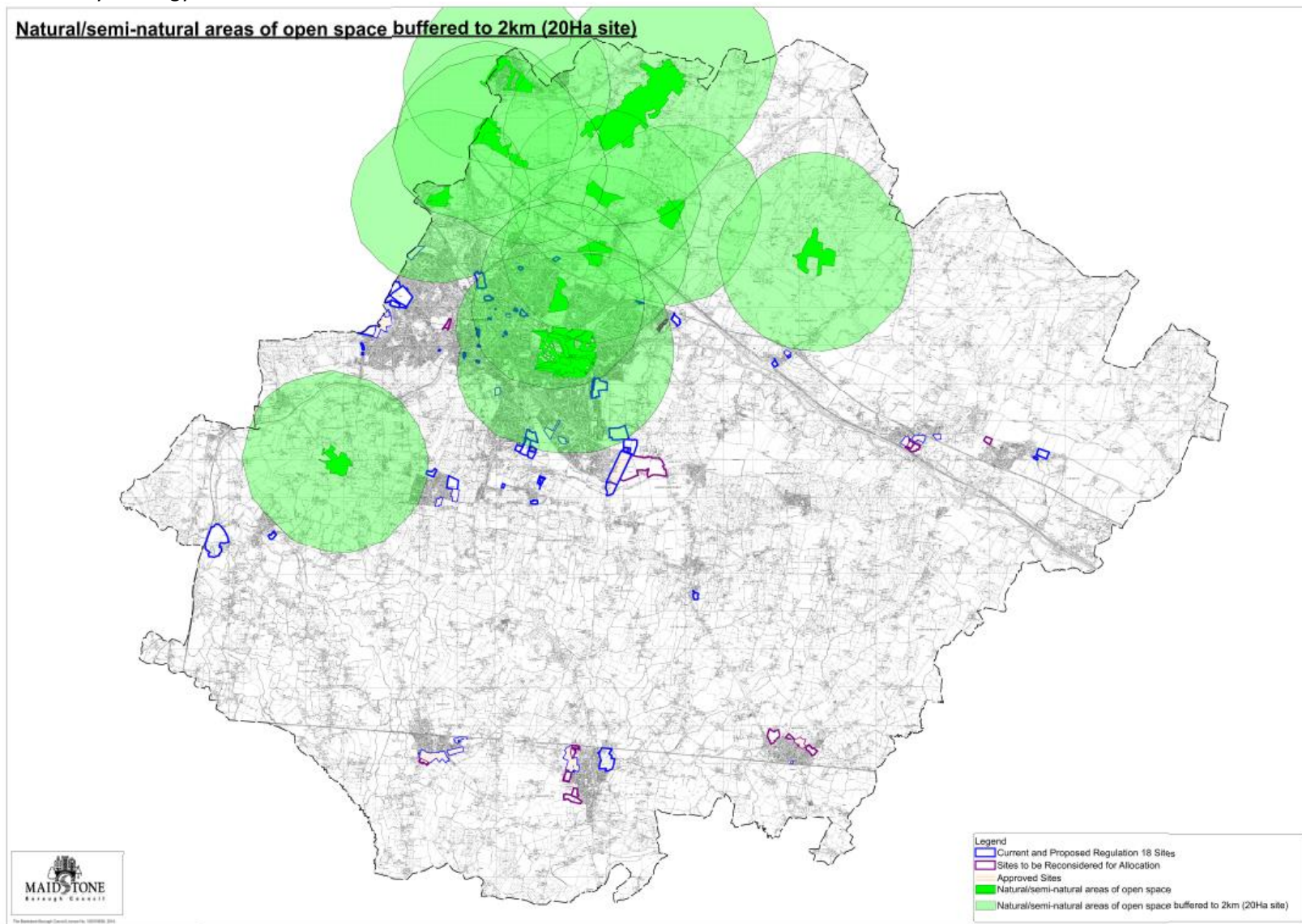
The Maidstone Infrastructure Delivery Plan outlines in greater detail the works to be done on Green and Blue infrastructure which includes provision of natural and semi-natural open space in the borough. This includes ~34ha of new open space, as well as the requirements for residential developments to provide on-site open space (or pay financial compensation for improvements to quality of off-site open space if on-site provision not possible) (Maidstone Borough Council, 2016). There is a significant risk of natural habitat becoming more fragmented and isolated because increasing urbanisation reduces suitability of intermediary areas.

For more detail, please see the Development Section 4.1

The quality of the open space was also assessed, and you can look up your local open spaces here: <http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/home/primary-services/planning-and-building/primary-areas/local-plan-information/tier-3-primary-areas/planning-payments> (ENV 007 Quality Audit 2015) (Maidstone Borough Council, 2015).

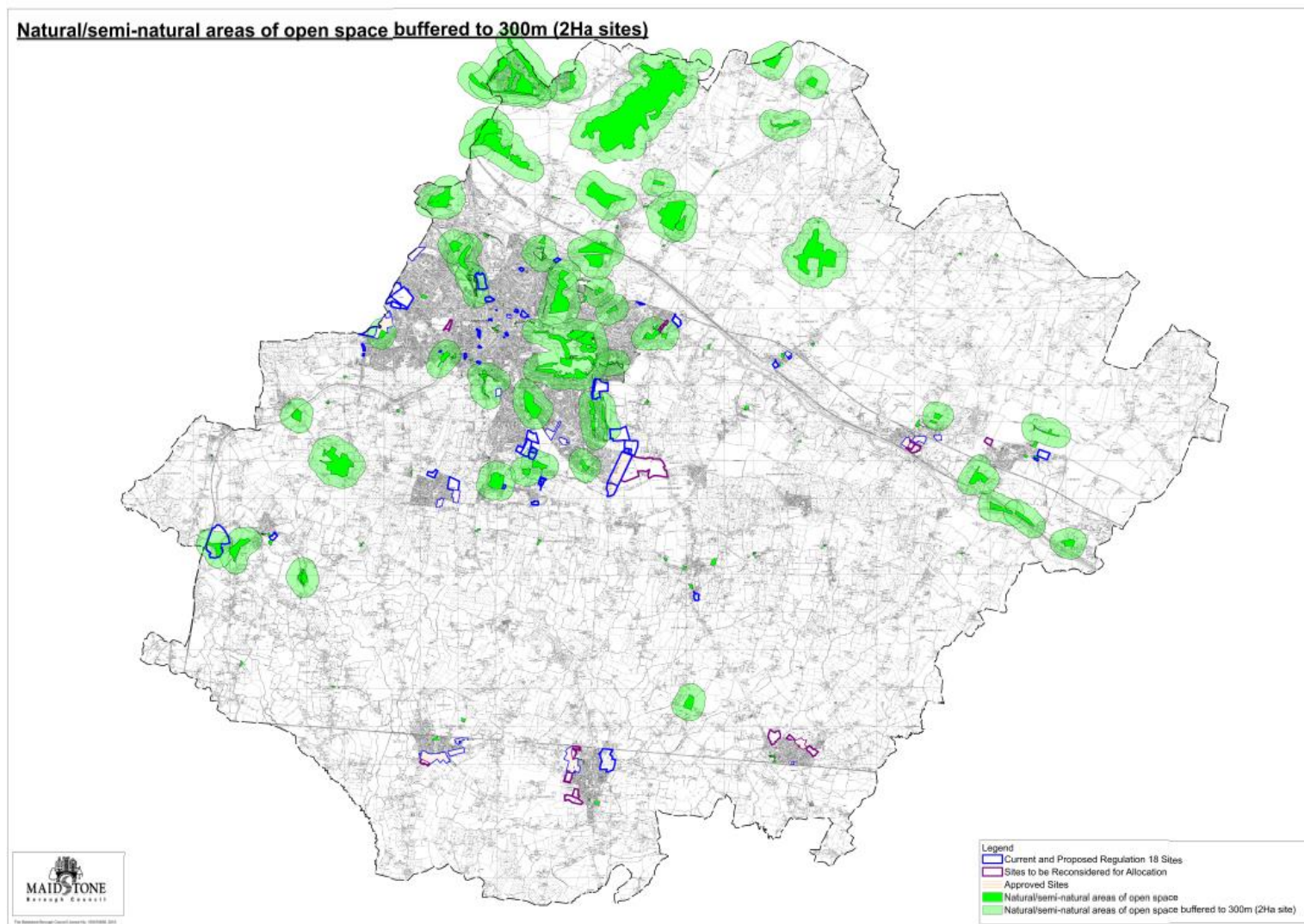
A survey was conducted on local public opinion on open space. Natural space was valued as very important or important by 94% of 401 people surveyed – this is higher than any other type of open space. 49% use natural and semi natural space once a week or more, 59% use it at least once a fortnight. Nature features was the top answer for most important aspect of open space. (Lake Market Research for Maidstone Borough Council, 2015).





Map of 20ha+ natural or semi-natural areas in Maidstone borough, with 2km buffers drawn around them. (Maidstone Borough Council, 2015)





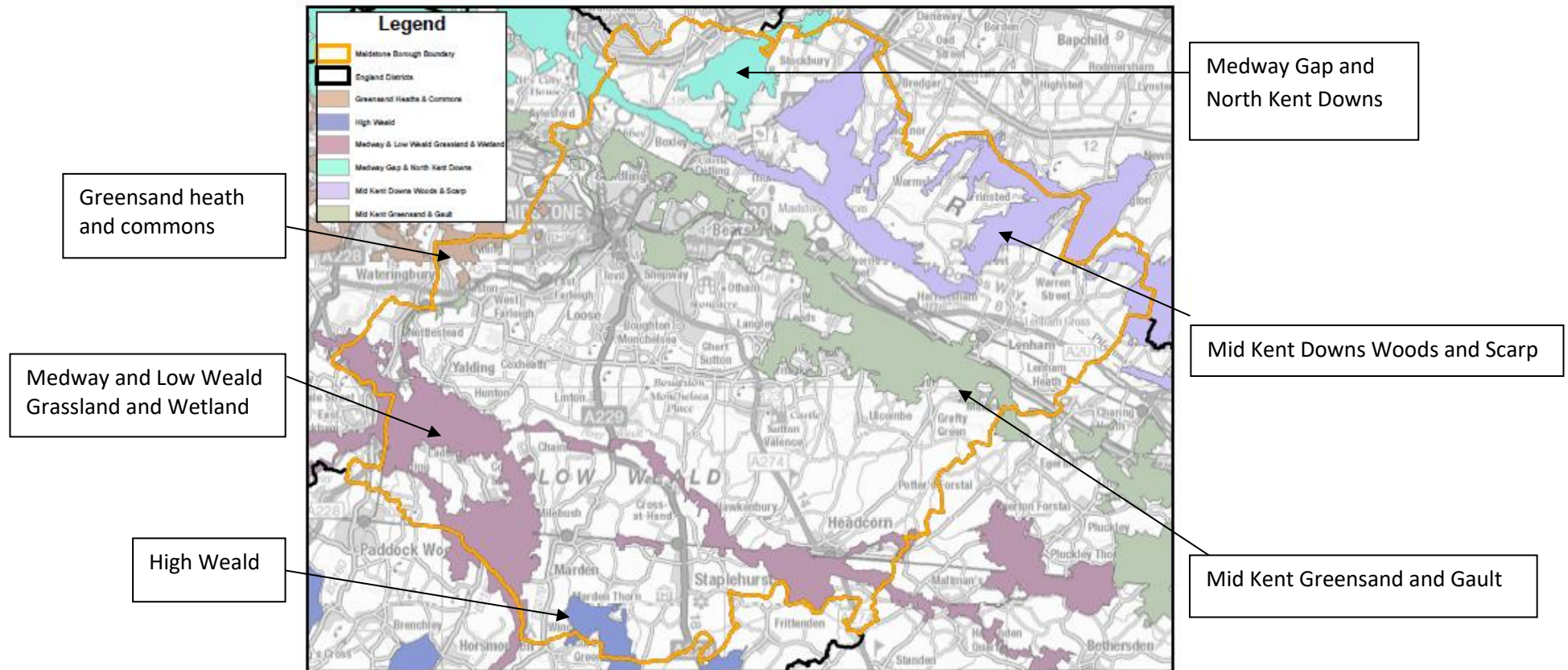
Map of 2ha+ natural or semi-natural areas in Maidstone borough, with 300m buffers drawn around them. (Maidstone Borough Council, 2015)



### 7.3 Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in Maidstone

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas are where the best opportunities are for establishing large habitat areas or a network of habitats. (Kent Nature Partnership, 2015)

#### Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in Maidstone



Biodiversity Opportunity Areas found in Maidstone borough (Kent Nature Partnership, 2015)	
Key habitats and species	Targets
<b>Mid Kent Downs Woods and Scarp:</b>	
Dense belts of wood, agricultural land at foot of scarp, important chalk grassland and woodland. Many Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Specific Scientific Interest. Bechstein's bat, brown hares, roman snail.	Protect existing habitat. Restore, recreate and reconnect chalk grassland. Enhance neutral grassland to create lowland meadow. Increase woodland management – buffer dip slope woods with semi-natural habitats.
<b>Greensand Heath and Commons:</b>	
Areas of heathy vegetation and acid grassland. Wood pasture. Rare acid woodland. Provides good habitat for bats, adders and a variety of birds.	Create acid grassland and heathland. Improve woodland management to reduce fragmentation. Enhancement of neutral grassland into lowland meadow. Restore quarries. Engage communities by increasing awareness.
<b>Medway Gap and North Kent Downs:</b>	
Woodlands, historical parks and chalk grassland. Tidal Medway with saltmarsh and intertidal mudflat – marsh, reedbeds, fen. Fragments of chalk grassland. Important brownfield sites such as disused quarries. Important arable weeds.	Enhance, create and restore chalk grassland. Increase woodland management. Enhance marsh reedbed and fen along Medway. Improve brownfield site and arable weed management. Creation of neutral grassland. Increase public access.
<b>Mid Kent Greensand and Gault:</b>	
Farmed landscape following scarp foot of the Downs. Heathland, parkland and woodland, wood pasture. Rivers and wetland. Nationally important acid grassland and heathland. Lots of LWSs and SSSIs. Water vole, white-clawed crayfish and Desmoulins's whorl snail, shill carder bee, keeled skimmer dragonfly	Recreate and restore acid grassland and heathland. Enhance woodland management. Increase ecological status of water bodies. Wetland restoration and recreation.
<b>High Weald:</b>	
Dispersed area of wood, heath and acid grassland, neutral grassland, streams and ponds, over sandstones and clays. Ancient wood. Unique assemblage of acidic freshwater habitats including furnace and hammer ponds. Notable populations of Bechstein's bat, birds, insects and bryophytes.	Actively conserve wood especially gill wood, heathy wood and wood pasture. Conserve lowland meadow. Restore or create heathland, acid grassland and natural grassland. Restore water to good ecological status.
<b>Medway and Low Weald Grassland and Wetland:</b>	
Wetland habitats including rivers, ponds, fen and wet woodland. Area contains the floodplain and tributaries of Medway, Beult and Teise. Provides habitat for river mussel, white-clawed crayfish, river lamprey and potentially otter.	Increase ecological status of water. Create wider river floodplains with riparian corridors. Catchment improvement (fen, wet wood, reed, wet grassland). Create neutral grassland. Increase management of woodland, lowland meadows, hedgerows and invasive non-native species.

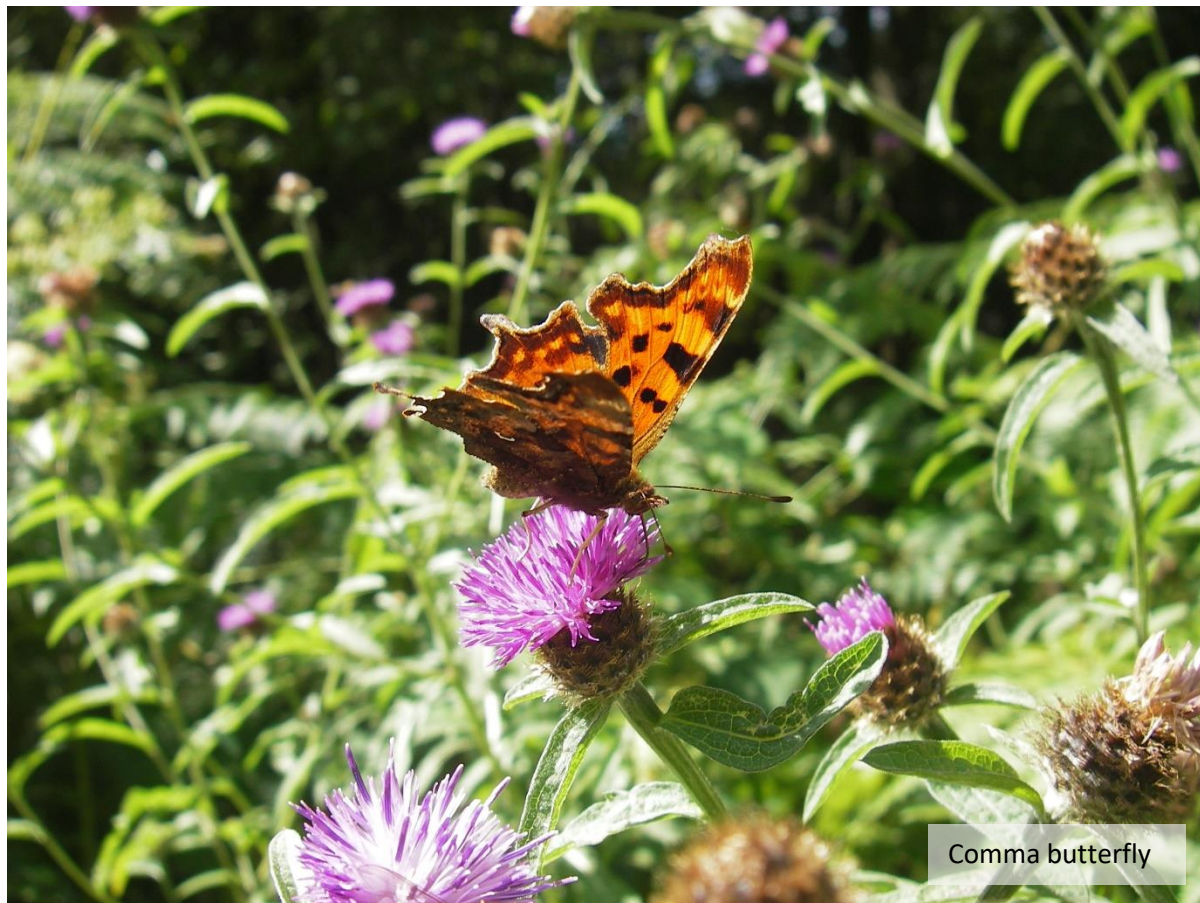
## 7.4 Species of Note

Whilst it is important to think about the bigger picture of large-scale habitat restoration and reducing negative pressures, considering individual species are important for two key reasons:

- Some species need specific help or have niche environmental needs that will not be met by delivering habitat level work. Without targeted action, these species are likely to decline further.
- Focussing on species can help to generate interest in conservation work and to engage different audiences. Some people will be more inspired and energised by projects focussing on helping hedgehogs than of naturalising urban greenspace.

The Kent Biodiversity Strategy (Kent Nature Partnership, 2015) identified 9 priority species and 2 species groups. Of these, all are found in Maidstone borough except the Shrill carder bee which can be found along the Thames Gateway in Kent. Data on records from these species or groups is shown below, focussing on the time period since the last Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy in 2008.

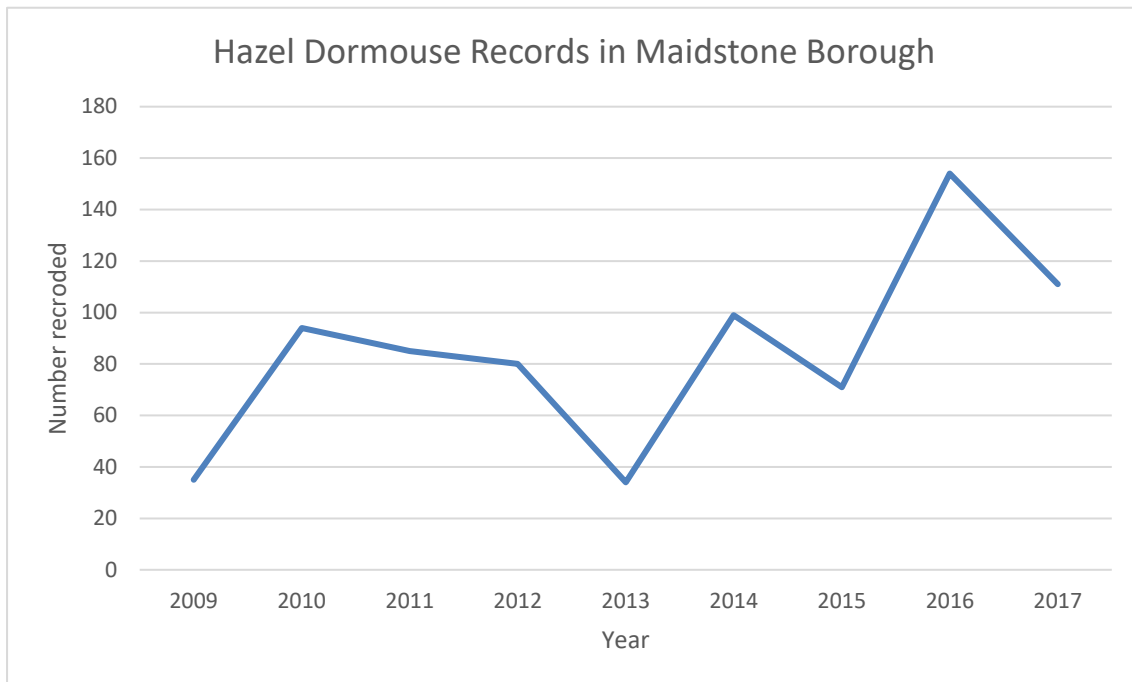
Insufficient data was available for mayflies or serotine bats so these are not shown below. All data is sourced from the Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre. For further detail on each species, including its threats and requirements, please see the Kent Biodiversity Strategy (Kent Nature Partnership, 2015). Please note – the following data and charts only show the number of records the Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre holds for each of the species or species groups. This data is not only affected by changes in abundance of the species, but also in changes in recorder effort. Improving and sustaining wildlife recoding is key to understanding the natural world and being able to protect it sufficiently.



Comma butterfly

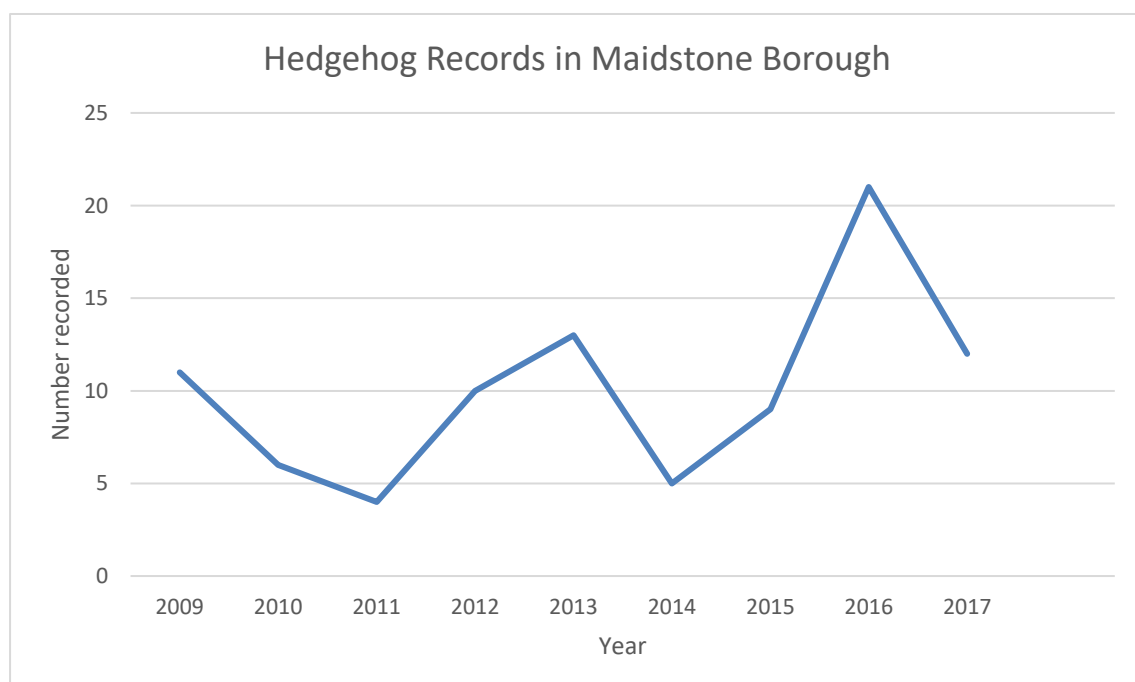
### Hazel dormouse

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Number of records</b>	35	94	85	80	34	99	71	154	111



### Hedgehog

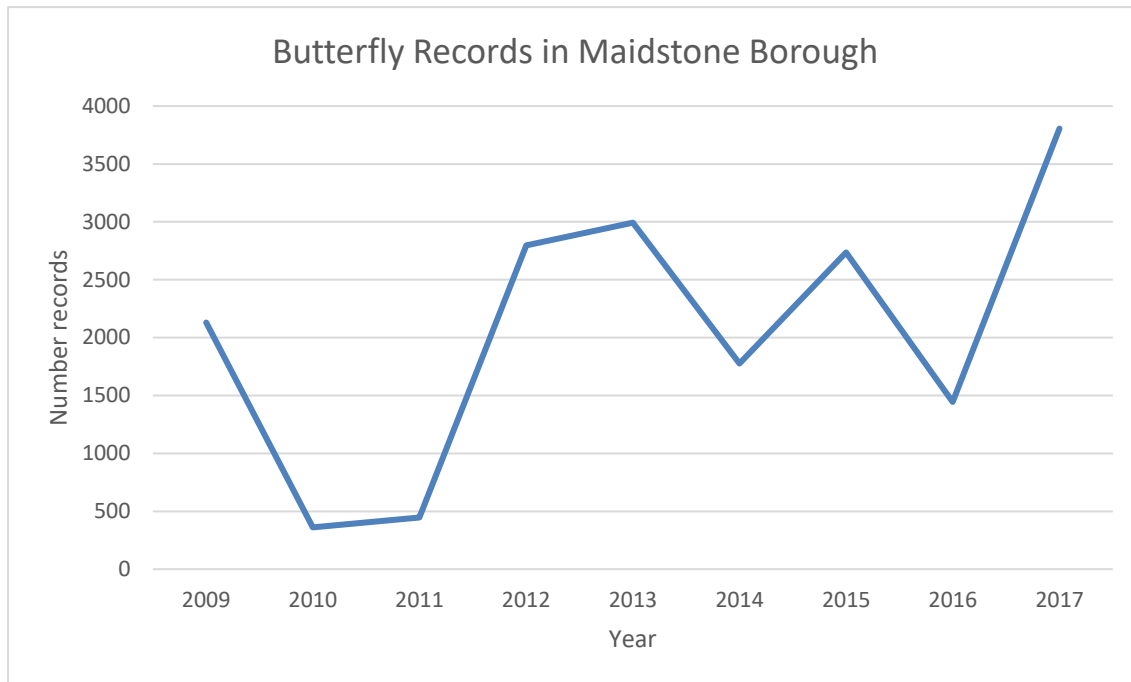
Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Number of records</b>	11	6	4	10	13	5	9	21	12





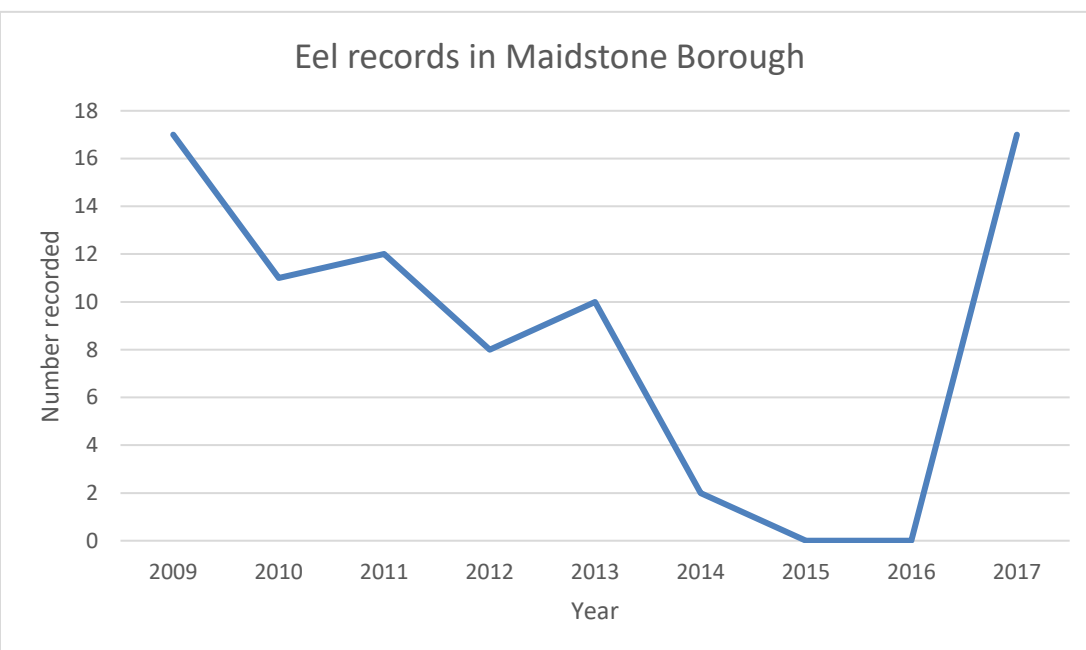
## Butterflies

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Number of records</b>	2131	361	446	2795	2994	1775	2736	1443	3805



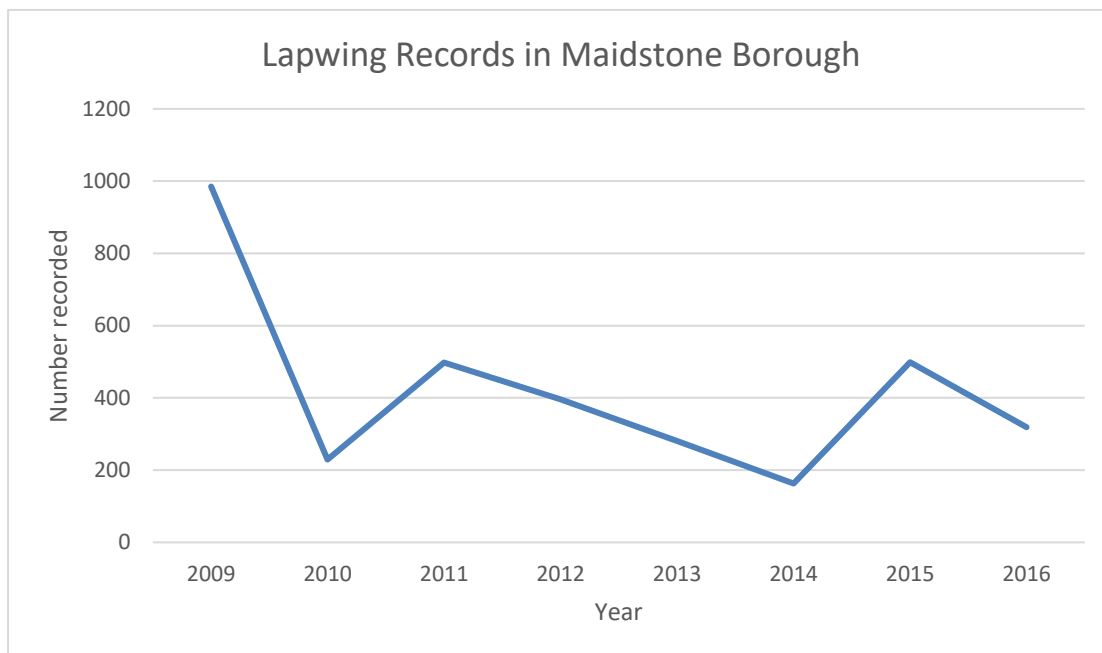
## European Eel

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Number of records</b>	17	11	12	8	10	2	0	0	17



## Lapwing

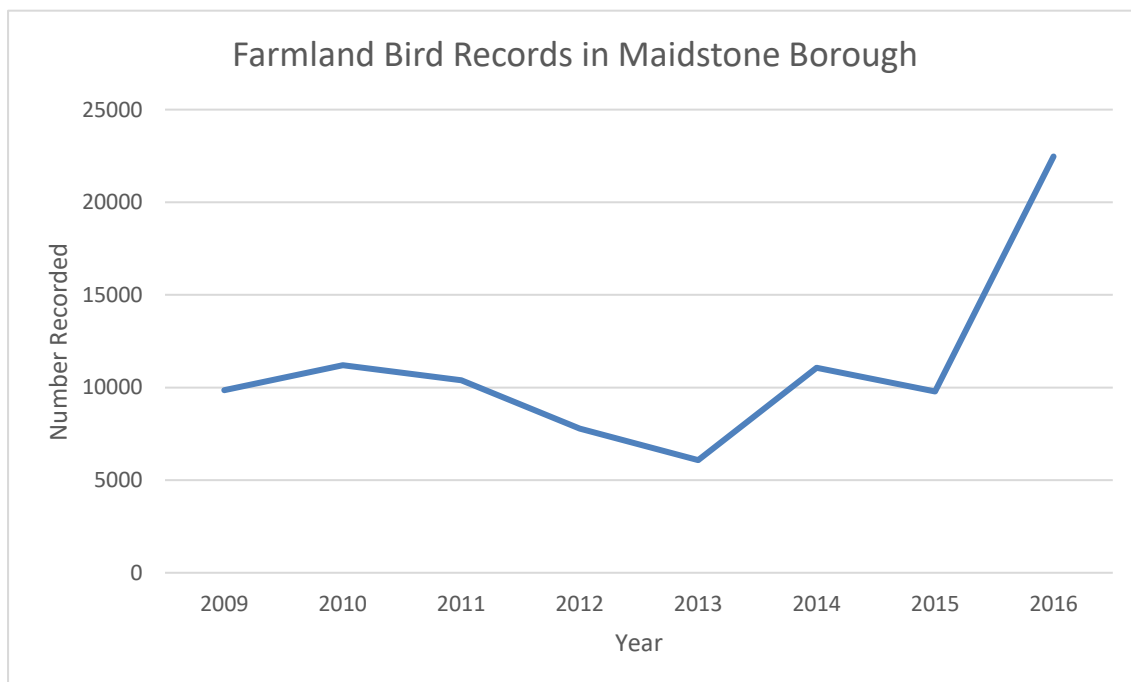
Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of records	985	229	498	396	281	163	499	319



## Farmland birds

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of records	985	229	498	396	281	163	499	319

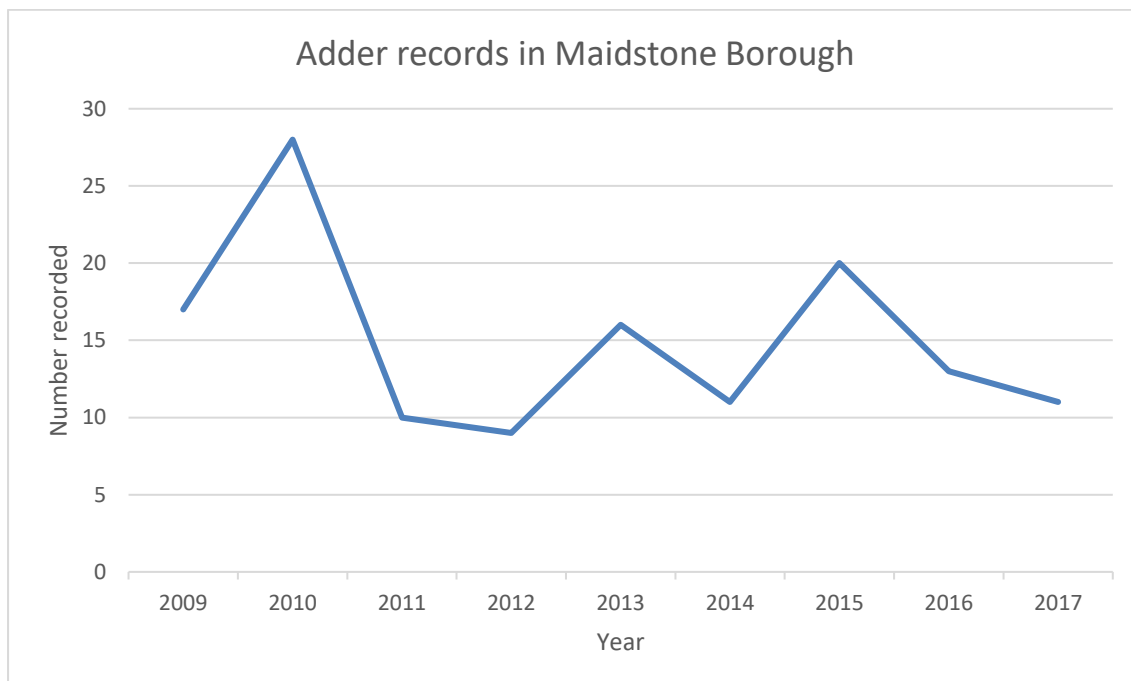
The 19 indicator species which make up this group can be found here: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/conservation-and-sustainability/farming/near-you/farmland-bird-indicator/>



## Adder

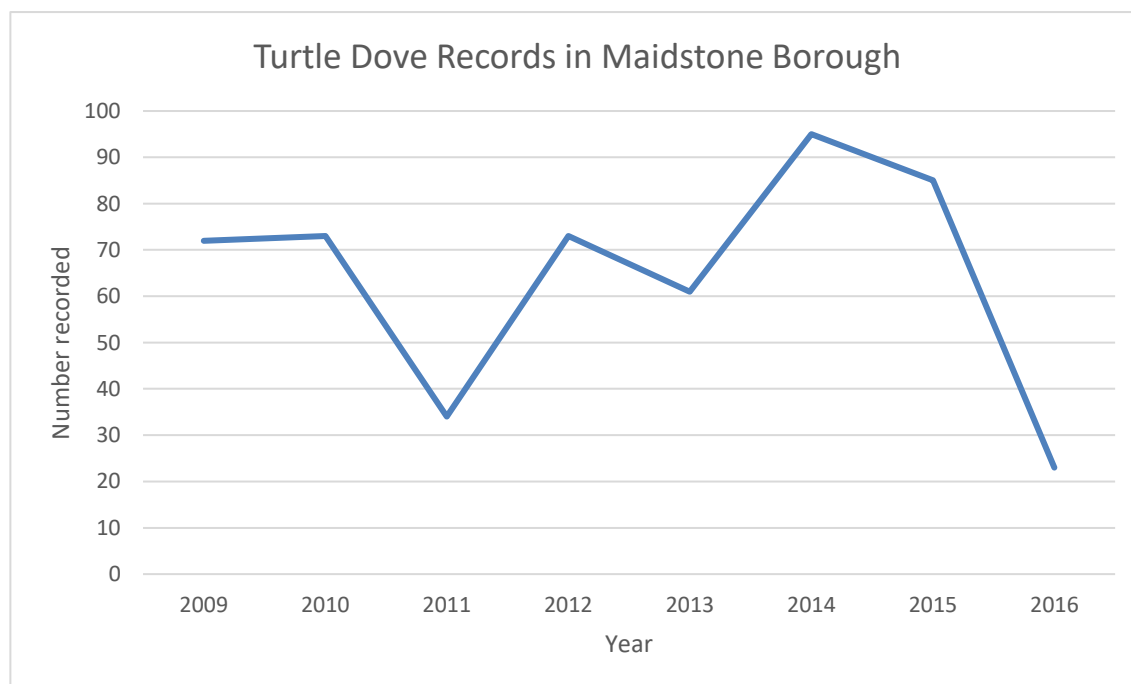
Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------

<b>Number of records</b>	2131	361	446	2795	2994	1775	2736	1443	3805
--------------------------	------	-----	-----	------	------	------	------	------	------



#### Turtle dove

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Number of records</b>	72	73	34	73	61	95	85	23

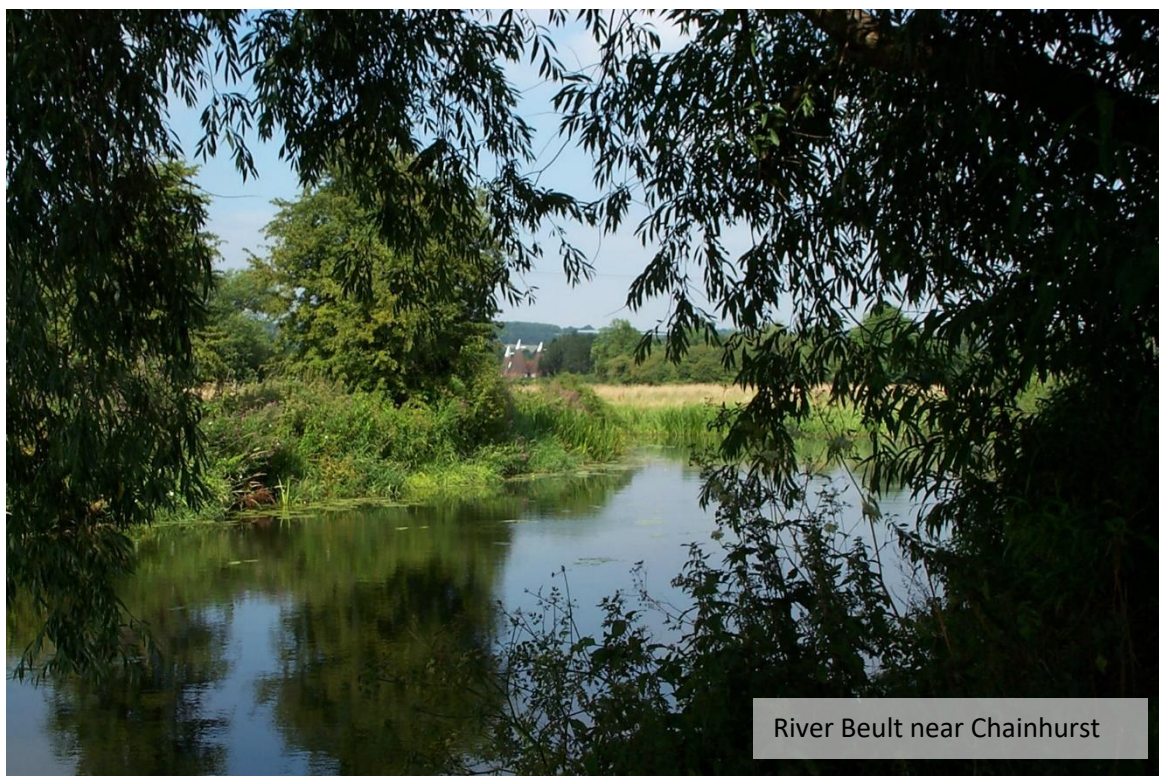


## 8. Habitats

The following sections look at the biodiversity opportunities, risks and actions for 4 habitat groups<sup>6</sup>. Each category relates to the Kent Habitat Survey categories in the following way:

Maidstone Borough Biodiversity Strategy Habitat Category	Kent Habitat Survey Classification
Woodland	Broadleaved, mixed, and yew woodland
	Coniferous woodland
Urban	Built-up areas
	Boundary and linear features
Water and wetland	Fen, marsh and swamp
	Rivers and Streams
	Standing open water and canals
Grassland  ----- — Agriculture	Acid grassland
	Bracken
	Calcareous grassland
	European dry heaths
	Inland rock/Quarry
	Neutral grassland
	Arable and horticulture
	Improved grassland
	Traditional orchard

You can find out what sort of habitats are near you on the Kent Landscape Information Service website: <https://webapps.kent.gov.uk/KCC.KLIS.Web.Sites.Public/ViewMap.aspx> Select the Kent Habitat Survey 2012 from the Habitat Survey drop down list.



River Beult near Chainhurst

<sup>6</sup> This grouping is based on feedback from community consultation which strongly recommended keeping habitat sections simple.



## 8.1 Woodland

### 8.1.1 Maidstone Borough Woodland

Maidstone has much broadleaved woodland, with limited areas of coniferous woodland in the north-east of the borough. More than two-fifths (44.3%) of Kent's yew woods are in Maidstone borough, which is also home to 15.6% of the alluvial forests dominated by alder and ash. (ARCH, 2012)

Several key woodland sites are owned or managed by Kent Wildlife Trust. These include:

- Kiln Wood (ancient woodland which support dormice and orchids),
- Stockbury Hill (Kent Wildlife Trust's first reserve, ancient woodland which supports white-letter hairstreaks, various ancient woodland flowers)
- Quarry Wood (ancient woodland Local Wildlife Site, which supports populations of water shrew, bats, nightingale, kingfisher, goldcrest, badger and a variety of fungi)

Various local bodies manage other important areas of woodland in the borough, such as the Bredhurst Woodland Action Group, a volunteer led group managing ancient woodland which supports over 50 ancient woodland indicator species of ground flora. These woodlands provide important services such as climate mitigation, recreation, air quality, aesthetics and flood management.

The Woodland Trust also manage a key site, the Hucking estate, which is one of their top ten bluebell woods. The Woodland Trust wants to work with local landowners who can increase woodland coverage to deliver large scale woodland creation to link isolated ancient woods.



Woodland floor with blanket of wood anemone



**Legend**

- Maidstone Borough Boundary
- England Districts
- Coniferous woodland
- Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland

**250k Greyscale**

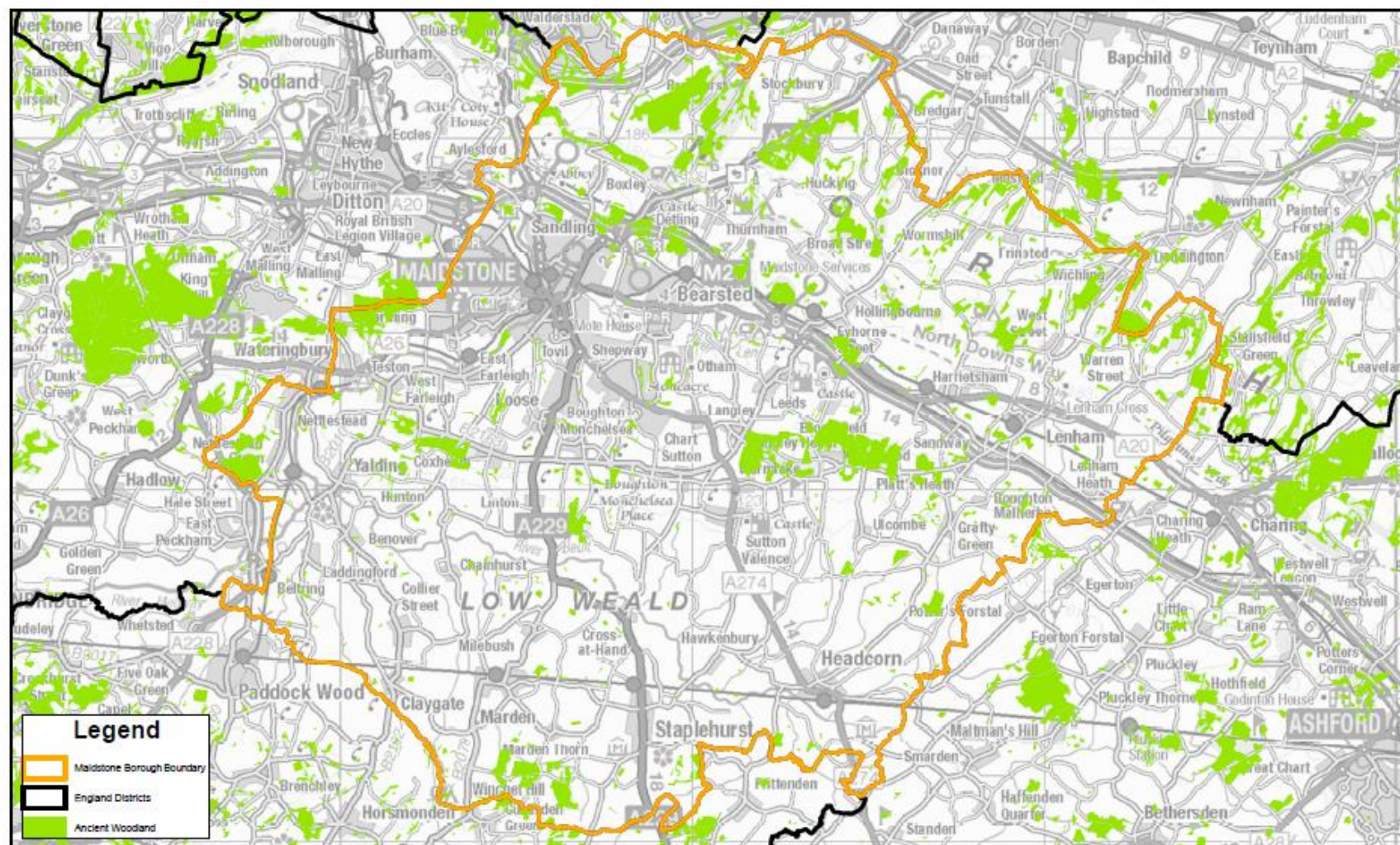
Value

- High: 253
- Low: 48

The map shows coniferous woodland in blue and broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland in pink.



## Ancient Woodland in Maidstone Borough



Ancient woodland is shown in lime green.

7% of the borough is woodland, of which 85% is ancient (Sansum et al., 2012).

### 8.1.2 Key Challenges

Kent has more ancient wood than any other county (Butfoy, et al., 2019) and it is vital that Maidstone borough plays its part in protecting this valuable resource. A key challenge is retaining the function and extent of this woodland, in the light of development pressures, with high targets for increasing housing and infrastructure.

#### Ancient wood:

land that has been wooded since 1600AD. This includes ancient replanted woodland where original native tree cover has been felled and replaced by planted stock. (Sansum, et al., 2012)

Fragmentation is a big threat, particularly in the North Downs area, because ancient semi-natural woodland is often surrounded by intensive arable land. For example, Horish Wood near Detling is isolated by M20, A249 and the HS1 train line. These infrastructure developments have made the site drier, where it was wet woodland previously.

Maintaining high biodiversity in woodlands is also dependent on suitable management. In some cases, this will require more extensive action than others – such as the management of traditional coppice woodland. Undermanaged woodland can lead to lower biodiversity due to a lack of light reaching the ground, reducing the diversity of ground flora.

Tree diseases such as ash dieback are also a key threat. The transport links through Kent to the continent made the area particularly at risk from the introduction of new diseases.

### 8.1.3 Wider Policy Objectives

The Kent Tree Strategy includes several objectives for woodland in Kent which can be applied to Maidstone borough. The Kent Tree Strategy Vision includes increasing woodland cover from 13% to 24% by 2100 and to 15% by 2044. For Maidstone Borough, tree cover was 7% of the borough in 2012 (Sansum, et al., 2012), so to achieve 24% by 2100, an additional 6295ha would need to be created (and an additional 2754ha to achieve 15% by 2044). (Butfoy, et al., 2019)

The Kent Tree Strategy (Butfoy, et al., 2019) provides further objectives on new and secondary wood:

- Plant 11.4million trees by 2044
- Plant and maintain at least 4579ha of new native woodland cover in the Weald as part of the Wealden Wildwood project

### 8.1.4 Recommendations

In addition to the level of woodland creation referred to above, a key action is to prevent overgrowth into dense woodland by increasing traditional management and creating glades, rides and coppiced areas.

This will help to increase habitat variety. Similarly, the creation of buffers or ecotones at the woodland edge (instead of a sudden change from dense woodland to built-environment, agricultural land or amenity grassland) will help to reduce edge effects and will create valuable habitats in its own right.

Furthermore, dead wood should be retained in situ as this provides valuable habitat for many insects, fungi and more.



Only native tree species should be planted – see Kent Tree Strategy (Butfoy, et al., 2019) for further advice.

The risk of spreading tree diseases should be minimised by using local stock from local nurseries wherever possible and using strict biosecurity procedures.

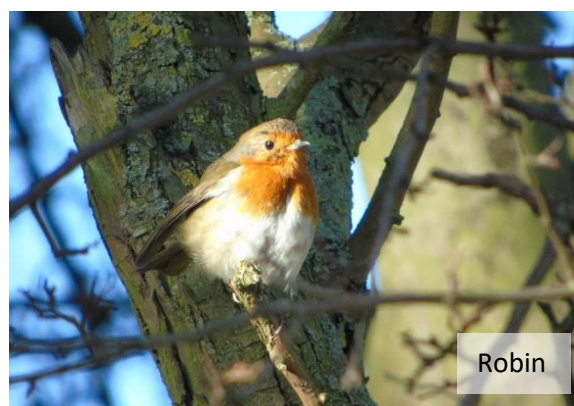
Landowners and managers of woodland should sign up to Woodland Trust's Tree Charter (Charter for Trees, Woods and People, 2019).

Ivy severance should only be conducted when necessary for public safety, assessed on a case-by-case basis. This is because ivy (through its nectar, pollen and berries) is an important food plant for various species including the holly blue butterfly. (Woodland Trust, 2019)

Anyone working on large-scale land management or planning that will affect woodland in the borough is advised to read the Kent Tree Strategy (Butfoy, et al., 2019) and incorporate the targets into their work.

#### 8.1.5 Relevant bodies

- Woodland Trust
- Maidstone Borough Council and Parish Councils
- Kent Wildlife Trust
- Private landowners





## 8.2 Urban Nature

### 8.2.1 Maidstone Borough Urban Habitat

The recently formed Maidstone Green Drinks group is focussed on environmental issues in Maidstone town and hopes to work to build awareness amongst the community, challenge inappropriate development proposals and promote greenspace and street trees in the town. You can find out more/ join in here: <http://www.greendrinks.org/Maidstone>

Several parks in urban areas are managed to provide habitat for wildlife and benefits to people, such as Whatman Park, the River Len Nature Reserve and Mote Park. Other groups working to protect the local environment can be found on the Go Green Go Wild pages:

[https://self.maidstone.gov.uk/service/Go Green Go Wild Find a Group Near You](https://self.maidstone.gov.uk/service/Go_Green_Go_Wild_Find_a_Group_Near_You)

The Maidstone Infrastructure Delivery Plan outlines in greater detail the works to be done on Green and Blue infrastructure which includes provision of natural and semi-natural open space in the borough. This includes ~34ha of open space, as well as the requirements for residential developments to provide on-site open space (or pay financial compensation for improvements to quality of off-site open space if on-site provision not possible). (Maidstone Borough Council, 2016)



Volunteers working on Fant Wildlife



Access to the countryside from urban areas



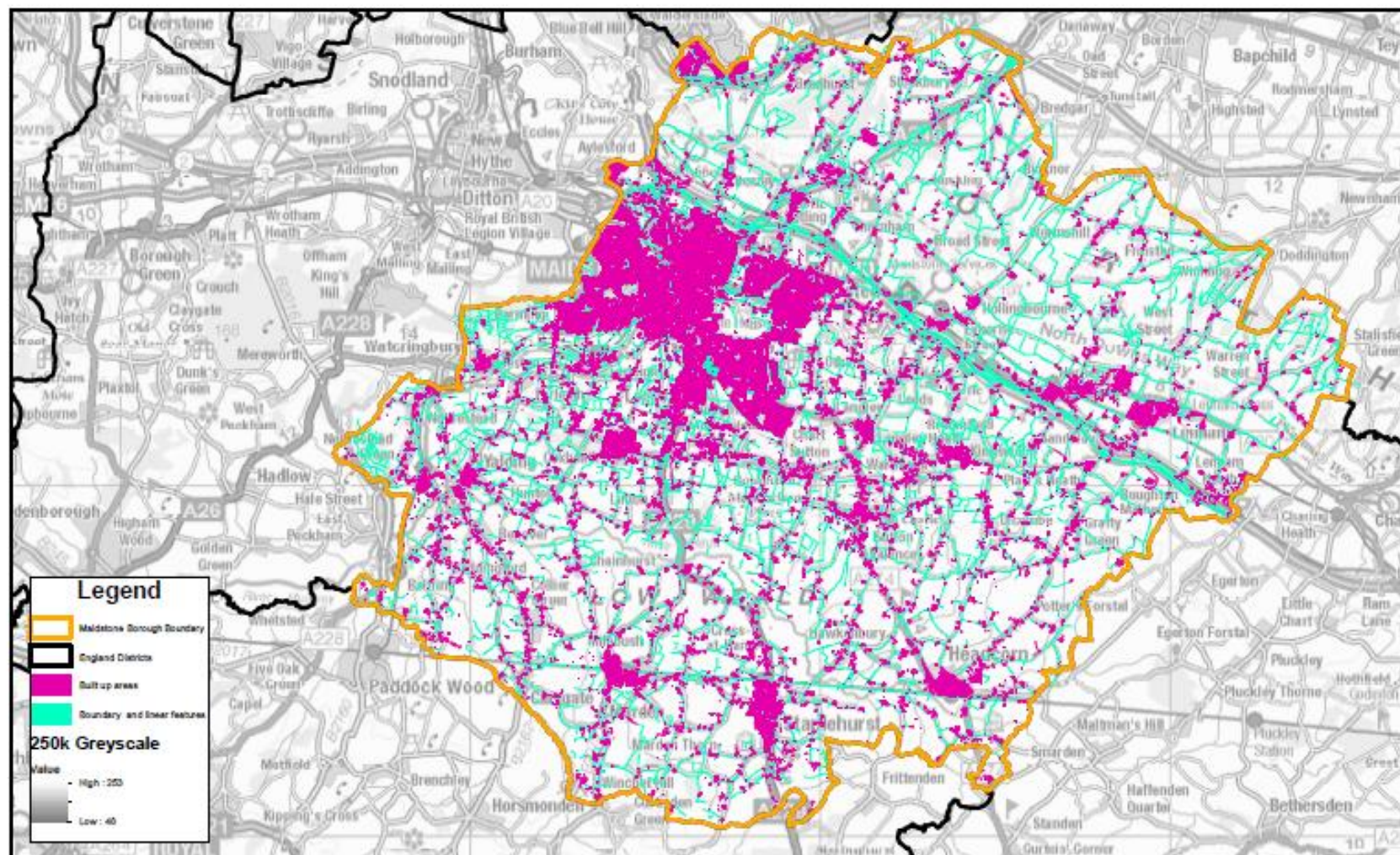
View of Mote Park lake



Hand-made insect homes



## Urban Habitat in Maidstone Borough



Data from Kent Habitat Survey 2012.

The map shows urban areas in the borough, including built-up areas in fuschia and linear features such as roads in turquoise.



### 8.2.2 Key Challenges

70% of the population live in the urban areas of the borough (Maidstone Borough Council, 2017). Access to nature is key to wellbeing and inhabitants of urban areas are less likely to have sufficient access.

Due to changes in building materials and techniques, the built environment is increasingly unsuitable for wildlife to cohabit alongside people – for example changes in building techniques and renovations of older buildings is thought to have reduced suitable swift nesting habitat leading to declines in their population.

### 8.2.3 Wider Policy Objectives

Biodiversity needs to be enhanced in urban areas including outside wildlife sites (Lawton, et al., 2010). Responsible authorities should take greater steps to reconnect people to nature by enhancing ecological networks within urban environments, including wildlife-friendly management of green spaces, and by embedding biodiversity considerations in the need to adapt to climate change. (Lawton, et al., 2010)

The recent international report on biodiversity (IPBES, 2019) provides four key objectives:

- Promoting urban gardens
- Design for ecological connectivity
- Combining grey and green infrastructure
- Enhance green spaces restoration and expansion

More information on incorporating space for wildlife into the built environment, including recommendations and relevant bodies can be found in the 'Biodiversity in the Planning Process' document appendix to this strategy.



Stretch of River Medway in central Maidstone



## 8.3 Water and Wetlands

### 8.3.1 Maidstone Borough Water and Wetlands

#### Pond restoration and creations:

A new scheme run by Natural England has been launched called District Level Licencing, designed to mitigate loss of ponds to development and create habitat for Great Crested Newts, a European Protected Species. Under this new scheme, ponds will be created in strategically chosen, well-connected locations that should result in more suitable habitat for Great Crested Newts (Natural England, 2019). The scheme is run by Natural England (contact [gcndll@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:gcndll@naturalengland.org.uk)) and habitat creation is delivered in the area by Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (contact [medwayvalley@kent.gov.uk](mailto:medwayvalley@kent.gov.uk)).

#### River Len

The River Len and the River Len Local Nature Reserve provides a natural corridor between town centre, Mote Park and the countryside. It contains a variety of wetland habitat including open water, wet woodland, damp grassland, spring-line seepages, and a sedge and reed-mace lined river channel. It is home to urban populations of DesMoulin's whorl snail, river snail, white-legged damselfly, water rail, with white-clawed crayfish recorded in its tributaries at Hollingbourne and Fairbourne. The surrounding habitat supports populations of bats (including pipistrelles, noctules and Daubenton's) and grassland butterflies and aquatic habitats support amphibian populations. The Nature Reserve acts as source population from which slow worms, butterflies and birds spread to other areas. The area provides many ecosystem services including an important role in flood storage, as well as carbon sequestration, phytoremediation, noise barrier and local climate regulation. Key issues are artificial modifications, diffuse pollution, pollution, trade exploitation and overfishing, domestic cesspit overflows and fragmentation by roads and hard development. To improve the area, surrounding land needs to be managed sympathetically and corridors need to be created to connect the Local Nature Reserve to other natural spaces.

#### River Beult

The River Beult is home to nationally scarce insects, including the hairy dragonfly and water beetle species. Emergent vegetation from the river provides habitat for white-legged damselflies and ruddy darter dragonflies, breeding sites for reed warblers and buntings, and hunting ground for kingfishers. Plant diversity is high where there are low wet ledges in the river (berms). The river provides many ecosystem services including recreation, flood control and a water source for agriculture. A 25km stretch between Smarden and Yalding is designated as a Site of Specific Scientific Interest. The river faces threats from pollution, artificial barriers and loss of habitat, resulting in poor ecological condition. The Environment Agency's report highlights the opportunities to improve the ecological condition of the river, and how it can provide greater benefits to people. The report sets out how this can be achieved through further re-naturalisation of the river, through the creation of berms, meanders, graded banks and gravels. (Environment Agency and Natural England, 2018)

#### River Medway

The River Medway is a key feature in the borough, providing recreational benefits to many people. Its tributaries are more biodiverse than the main river which faces many challenges including invasive non-native species, artificial modifications and obstructions, pollution from leaking septic tanks, litter and agricultural and road run-off. There are many stakeholders involved with work on

the river that need to come together to re-naturalise the river. Improvements could be made by creating micro-habitats along the river, as well as larger scale projects to recreate floodplain meadows and meanders. Urban development in the vicinity of the river needs sufficient green infrastructure plans, with funding for maintenance and management, and suitable flood mitigation – buffer zones with reed beds and ponds.



Hammer stream



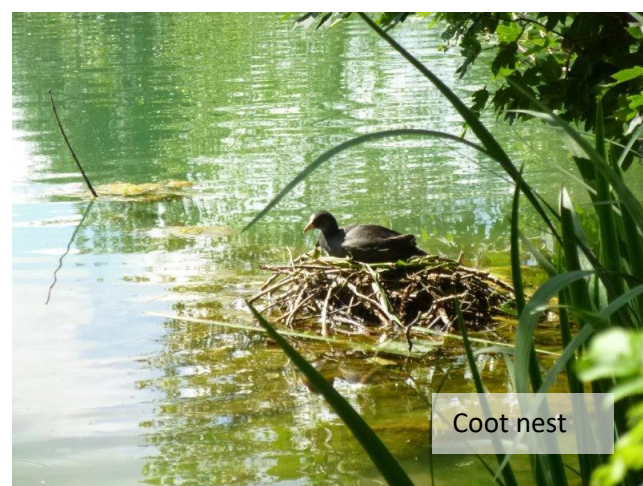
Water vole



Common seal at Allington Lock



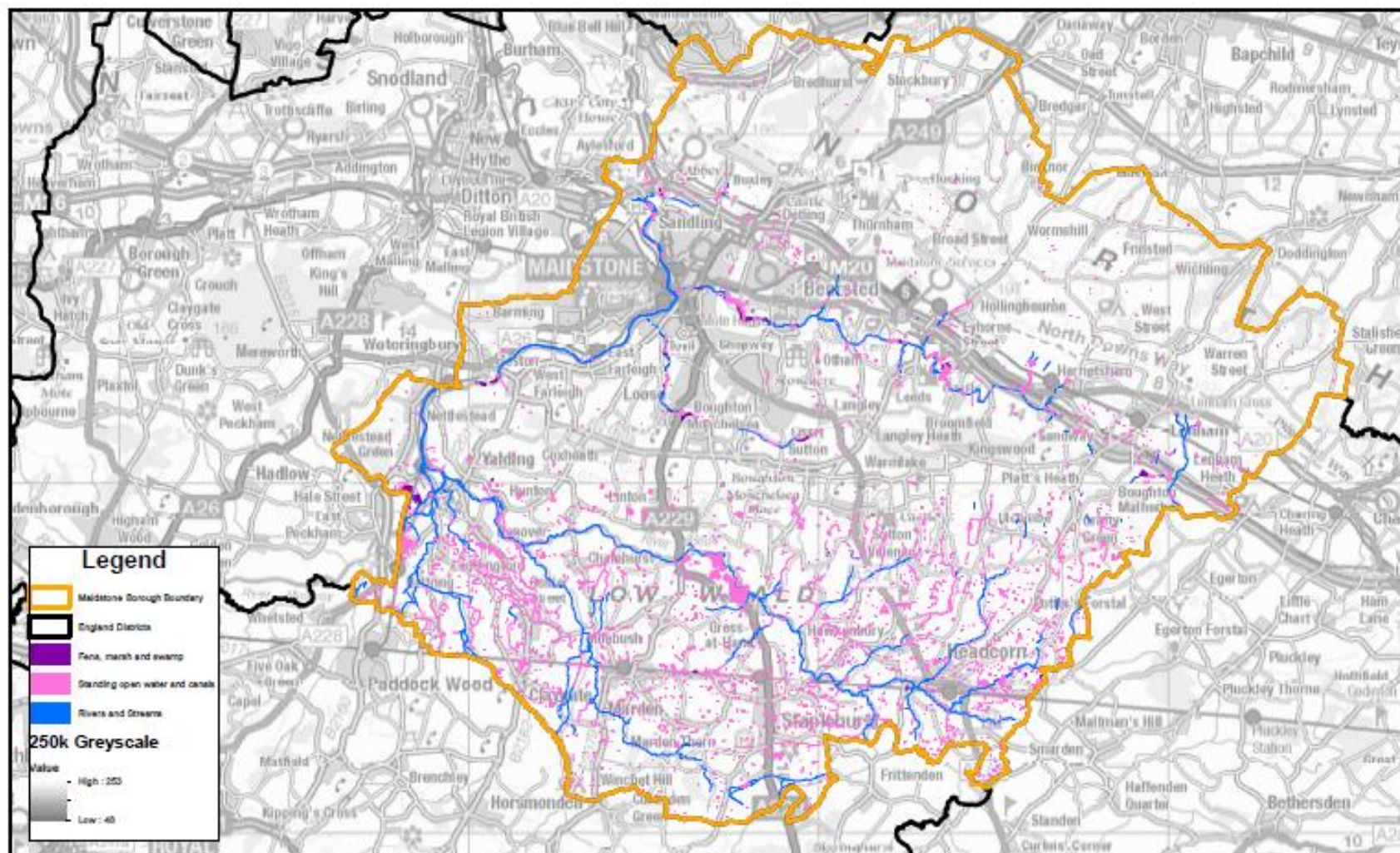
Marsh frog, an invasive species



Coot nest



## Water and Wetland Habitat in Maidstone Borough



Data from Kent Habitat Survey 2012.

The map shows ponds and canals in pink, marsh in purple and rivers in blue.

### 8.3.2 Key Challenges

At a global level, the habitat type showing the highest rates of decline are the inland waters and freshwater ecosystems (IPBES, 2019). Rivers are worst performing habitat type of all Sites of Specific Scientific Interest, and only 22% have 'good' ecological status under Water Framework Directive criteria (Lawton, et al., 2010) data from 2009). The Water White Paper (Defra 2011) found that only ¼ of rivers and lakes are fully functioning ecosystems. More chalk rivers than any other country in Europe (Lawton, et al., 2010). 50% of the UK's ponds were lost in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and 80% of those that remain are in a poor state. (Freshwater Habitats Trust, 2019).

The Thames River Basin Management Plan (into which the Medway area fits) highlights significant management issues for rivers in the South East:

- Physical modifications affect 44% of water bodies
- Pollution from wastewater affects 45% of water bodies
- Pollution from rural areas affects 27% of water bodies
- Pollution from towns, cities and transport affects 17% of water bodies
- Changes to natural flow and water level (abstraction and reduced rainfall) affects 12% of water bodies
- Invasive Non-Native Species affects 3% of water bodies

Invasive non-native species are a major challenge for the biodiversity of rivers and wetlands in Maidstone borough. See section 4.4 for more details.

### 8.3.3

The Government's Natural Choice White Paper provides the following vision: *"By 2050, water bodies in England will be in excellent health, with reduced pollution (nutrients, sediments, chemicals and bacteria). They will sustain rich and abundant wildlife appropriate to their location and will be as resilient as possible to climate change. Water environments will be safe and attractive, supporting a wide range of sustainable uses, including leisure and recreation.... We will reduce the impact of land management on water by ensuring that pollution and flood risk are addressed at source through targeted, risk-based enforcement of existing regulatory instruments and, beyond this, by identifying where land can be managed to deliver multiple benefits, including improving water quality, flood alleviation and biodiversity."* (Defra, 2011)

### Wider Policy Objectives

The recent international report on biodiversity (IPBES, 2019) provides five key objectives:

- Integrate water resource management and landscape planning
- Limiting expansions and mining
- Mainstream practices that reduce erosion, sedimentation and pollution runoff
- Promote decentralised rainwater collection e.g. household based
- Minimise negative impact of dams

### 8.3.4 Recommendations

New development adjacent to the river must demonstrate that they will not impact on the river's ability to function naturally and should enhance green infrastructure and wildlife corridors.

As advised in the Lawton review, public bodies and statutory undertakers planning the management of water resources should:

- Make space for water and wildlife along rivers and around wetland
- Restore natural processes in river catchments
- Accelerate the programme to reduce nutrient overload (Lawton, et al., 2010)

The Thames River Basin Management Plan (Defra and the Environment Agency, 2015) sets out the responsibility for the local government to prevent deterioration in the following ways:

1. Consider impact on water quality and ecology when preparing spatial plans, minerals and waste plans, and local flood risk management plans, determining planning applications and when planning council-owned buildings and infrastructure.
2. Pollution from towns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use planning conditions, legal agreements and enforcement to prevent pollution from developments, roads and infrastructure.</li> <li>• Ensure new developments address potential pollution problems by using SUDS to manage surface water.</li> <li>• Rectify misconnected wastewater pipes and stop water pollution from unauthorised operations.</li> <li>• Work with industry, manufacturing and other business and NGOs to develop joint improvement programmes.</li> </ul>
3. Set out local plan policies requiring new homes to meet tighter water efficiency standard of 100L per person per day.
4. Commission water cycle studies to inform spatial planning decision around local water resources
5. Raise awareness of challenge of invasive non-native species and promote biosecure practices amongst staff working outdoors.
6. Use planning conditions, legal agreements and enforcement powers of Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to prevent rural pollution.

Furthermore, the Maidstone Infrastructure Delivery Plan (Maidstone Borough Council, 2016) includes 'desirable' infrastructure works relating to rivers in the green and blue infrastructure section:

- Removal of fish pass at Yalding
- River restoration of Sherway stream
- River restoration of Upper Loose
- Introduction of a sustainable fish monitoring programme on Medway

### 8.3.5 Relevant bodies

- Medway Valley Countryside Partnership and South East River Trust are the partnership group hosts for the Medway Catchment and should be consulted in relation to projects on the river, such as removal of structures or installation of fish passes in the borough such as at East Farleigh Lock.
- FIND MBC CONTACT FOR RIVERS



## 8.4 Grassland and Agriculture

### 8.4.1 Maidstone Borough Grassland and Agricultural land

Maidstone has 14.2% of Kent's calcareous grassland and over 20% of Kent's traditional orchard. (ARCH, 2012)

Maidstone borough has a variety of grassland habitats including:

- Calcareous grassland: All the calcareous grassland in the borough falls within the Kent Downs AONB.
- Acid grassland and heath: Limited areas can be found along the Greensand Ridge between Maidstone and Lenham.
- Neutral grassland: Areas can be found across the borough and are more common than calcareous or acid grassland. Maidstone has 15.6% of Kent's lowland meadow (high diversity neutral grasslands). (ARCH, 2012)
- Improved grassland: Very common across the borough – most sheep and cattle farms will graze their animals on improved grassland.

Other agricultural land uses include:

- Traditional orchards: 23% of Kent's traditional orchard is found in Maidstone borough, mainly in the south west of the borough.
- Arable and horticulture: Very common across the borough.



Find out more about the value of calcareous grassland here:

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/habitats/grassland/lowland-calcareous-grassland>

Or on the Old Chalk New Downs project webpages:

<https://www.oldchalknewdowns.org.uk/>

#### Calcareous grassland:

Found on thin alkaline soils found on substrate of chalk or limestone, usually consists of short hardy grasses and flowers. Provides important habitat for butterflies. Usually grazed by sheep. High floristic diversity found on good quality calcareous grassland support diverse invertebrate communities.

**Acid grassland and heath:** Found on low-nutrient acid soils, often with sand/gravel deposits. Heathland sites often also include patchy or scattered gorse, acid grassland areas, bare ground scrub and occasional trees, open water and *Sphagnum*-dominated bogs and fens. High floristic diversity found on good quality acid grassland support diverse invertebrate communities.

**Neutral grassland:** Found on neutral soils (neither alkaline nor acid), includes grazing marsh and rank grassland. Variable biodiversity value.

**Improved grassland:** High nutrient soils result in low diversity grasslands. This includes most agricultural pasture, amenity grassland, urban parks, and a typical garden lawn and are usually of low biodiversity value.

(ARCH, 2012)

### Key sites

The Kent Wild Trust sites in the Heaths Countryside Corridor - Bull Heath and Chilston Pines Ponds - are uncommon wet heath and acid grasslands found on the Greensand Ridge. They provide rare habitat for solitary and burrowing bees and wasps and support populations of notable beetles, birds and plants.

The Larches, another Kent Wildlife Trust site includes areas of chalk grassland. The Larches is the borough's only site designated as a Special Area of Conservation. It is also a Site of Specific Scientific Interest and falls within the Kent Downs AONB. It provides habitat various important and rare groups for orchids, adonis and chalkhill blue butterflies, adders, dormice and bats. Kent Wildlife Trust have restored traditional habitat management techniques which are need needed to restore Favourable Condition of the site.

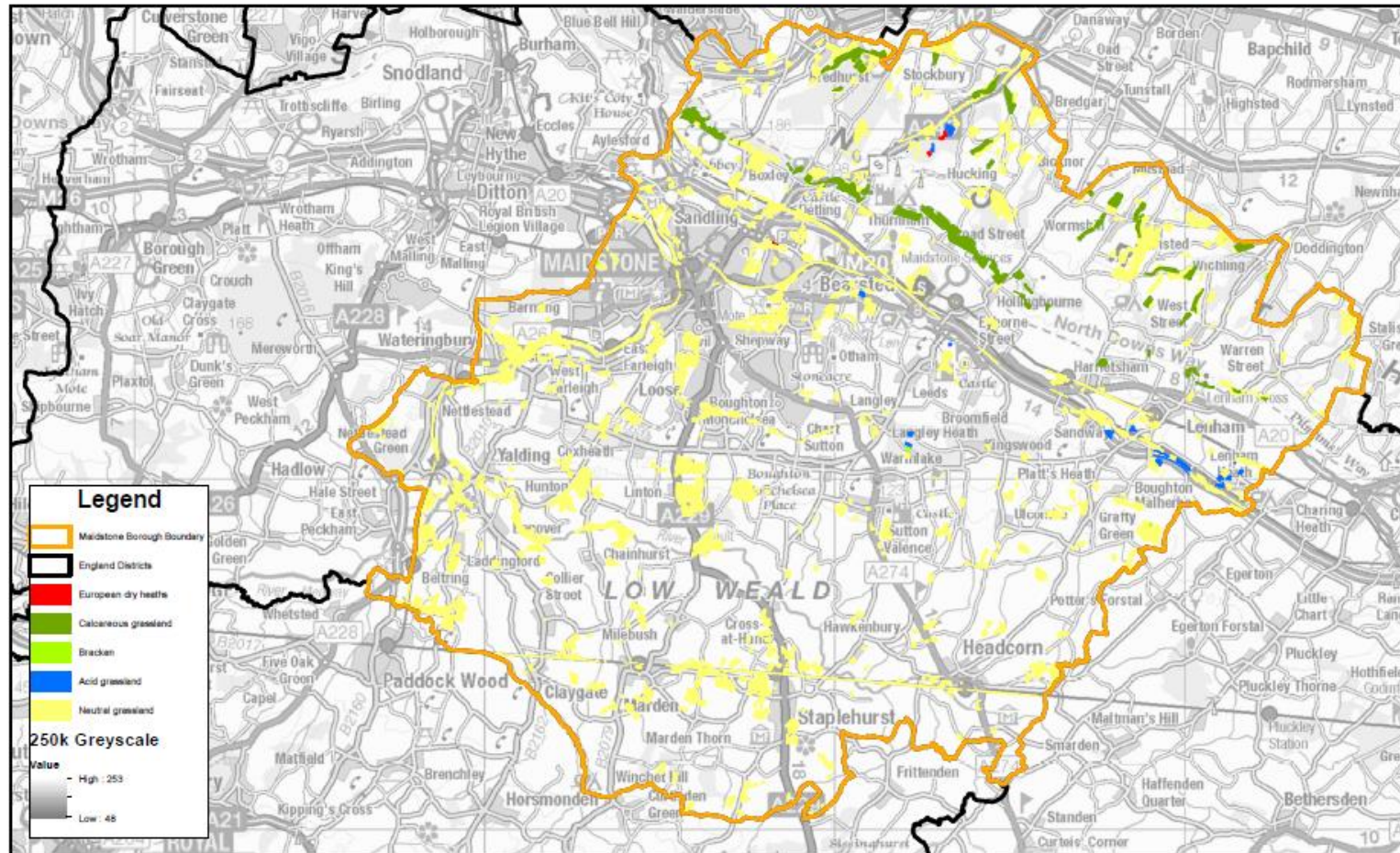
The Bredhurst Woodland managed by Bredhurst Woodland Action Group also includes an of area chalk grassland with high floristic diversity, including 12-13 orchid species.

The Hollingbourne Meadows Trust managed grasslands also provide high diversity grassland in the region. By creating ecotones and microhabitats through their site management, the site provides a variety of habitats to support a greater range of species.





## Grassland Habitat in Maidstone Borough

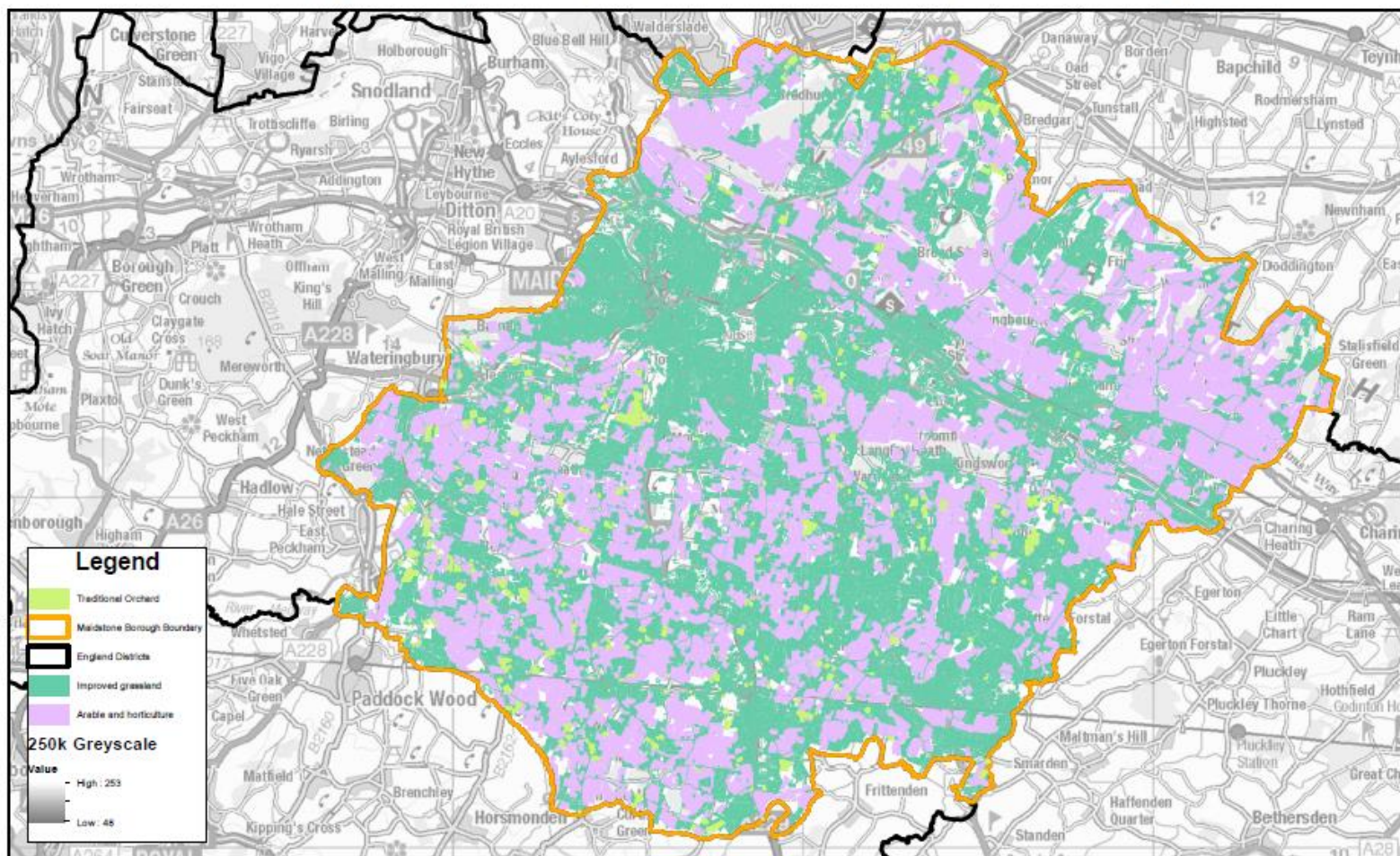


Data from Kent Habitat Survey 2012.

The map shows improved heath in red, calcareous grassland in dark green, bracken in lime, acid grassland in blue and neutral grassland in yellow.



## Agricultural Habitat in Maidstone Borough



Data from Kent Habitat Survey 2012.

The map shows improved grassland in green, traditional orchard in lime and arable and horticultural areas in lilac.

## 8.4.2 Key Challenges

England has 10% of the world's bumblebee species and 18% of world's heathland. England's hay meadows and chalk grassland are of international importance (Lawton, et al., 2010). However, over the long term, 60% of grassland and heathland species declined (Hayhow, et al., 2016) State of nature report. Two thirds of Kent's orchards and hops were lost between 1961 and 2008 (ARCH, 2012).

There is a big issue with fragmentation. This is partly due to the M20 and HS1 which cut through key areas of important grassland in the borough as they run along the Greensand Ridge and North Downs. Plants and insects that live in these habitats may be unable to disperse between fragments.

Agricultural intensification is another key challenge, often due to the use of pesticides and fertilisers which reduces on site biodiversity. Run-off and spray drift can also affect neighbouring areas of grassland. Acid and calcareous grasslands risk becoming improved grassland if not managed correctly to keep nutrient levels low.

Lack of grazing management of grassland sites is also threat to biodiversity as it reduces micro-habitat diversity that certain species depend on. 73% of the land is arable and horticulture (38%), or improved grassland (34.7%). (ARCH, 2012) Acid and calcareous grassland, which are low in nutrients, are at risk of becoming improved grassland through inappropriate management. The rarer grassland habitats and traditional orchards are also at risk of conversion to arable.

Grassland is often cut too often and too early in the year. Wildflowers need time to set seed - inappropriate cutting regimes often favour monocultures of more vigorous grasses such as perennial rye grass.

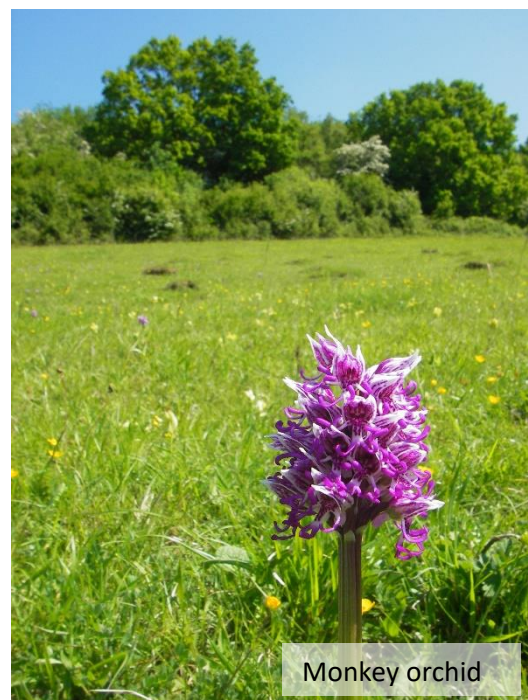
A lack of ride and glade management reduces the opportunities for acid grassland and heath patches within woodland complexes.

## 8.4.3 Wider Policy Objectives

The IBPES report recommends a reduction in intensive farming in favour of utilising the following management practices: integrated pest and nutrient management, organic farming, agroecological practices, soil and water conservation practices, agroforestry, silvopastoral systems and improved irrigation management. It also recommends farmers sign up to voluntary certification standards (IPBES, 2019)

The Lawton review calls for making the farmland matrix more benign for wildlife (Lawton, et al., 2010). Conserving agricultural genetic diversity is a target in Biodiversity2020. (Defra, 2011)

Defra also calls for improvement to soil management: *“By 2030 we want all of England's soils to be managed sustainably and degradation threats tackled successfully, in order to improve the quality of soils and to safeguard their ability to provide essential ecosystem services and functions for future generations.”* – This will be partially delivered through stewardship schemes and cross-compliance conditions (Defra, 2011).





#### 8.4.4 Recommendations

- Increase traditional management: using hay cuts, or suitably timed grazing, including mob grazing as appropriate.
- Reversion of improved grassland to calcareous, acid or neutral grassland. This can be achieved over a number of years through removal of nutrients through an appropriate cutting or grazing regime with removal of cuttings.
- Stop regular mowing of verges unless where critical for road safety. Grass areas should not be cut until after flowers have seeded in late summer.
- Public amenity grassland should be left to grow long where not in use for sports, following a late autumn cutting regime as described above. This will increase wildflower diversity, providing habitat for insects including the pollinating insects upon which we rely on for food production.
- Increase diversity of habitats: creation of micro-habitats and ecotones by varying management across the site such as leaving some areas shorter and longer when cutting.
- Restore and maintain structural diversity within areas of lowland calcareous grassland through creation of habitat features including patches of native scrub (incorporating local provenance shrubs grown from cutting and seed such as native box and juniper), bare ground and dew ponds.
- Council to avoid use of herbicides and pesticides except to combat INNS (see INNS section above).
- To tackle fragmentation of grassland habitats along the corridor from Maidstone to Ashford, the neighbouring borough councils and local landowners need to work together to improve the suitability of land between fragments using sympathetic management.

#### 8.4.5 Relevant Bodies

- Hollingbourne Meadows Trust: a community group and charitable trust that owns and manages land to restore wildflower meadows, with public access. Ongoing projects to introduce grazing cattle and create micro-habitats. See their website here: <http://www.hollingbournemeadowstrust.co.uk/>
- Bredhurst Woodland Action Group: a community group that manage chalk grassland with high diversity on North Downs with regular volunteer parties. See their website here: <https://bwag.org.uk/>
- Old Chalk New Downs: a project to restore and improve chalk grassland on the North Downs. <http://www.oldchalknewdowns.org.uk/>
- Maidstone Borough Council, working in partnership with neighbouring borough councils.
- Parish councils and other landowners
- Catchment Sensitive Farming: a project in partnership between Defra, the Environment Agency and Natural England (Natural England, Defra and Environment Agency, 2019). Provides advice, training and grant support for farmers and land managers to reduce water and air pollution from agriculture. Free support is available for those in high priority areas (these can be found on the MAGiC map: <https://magic.Defra.gov.uk/>). High priority areas in Maidstone borough are found along the M20 near Boxley. The Local Catchment Officer for the Medway is James Woodward ([james.woodward@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:james.woodward@naturalengland.org.uk))
- Colour in the Margins: Back from Brink's project to increase arable biodiversity <https://naturebftb.co.uk/the-projects/colour-in-the-margins/>
- Linking Environment and Farming: organisation working on increasing the environmental suitability of farmland <https://leafuk.org/>

## 9. Projects

The following projects should be implemented by local stakeholders, with Maidstone Borough Council playing a leading role. These provide focusses for Maidstone Borough Council to target effort and resources. These should be delivered in addition to changes in behaviour and land management as a result of advice elsewhere in this strategy. The timescales, partners, locations and funding need to be agreed as part of the Maidstone Borough Council's Implementation Plan (see Project 6).

### Projects to Provide Habitat

#### 1. Wealden Wildwood

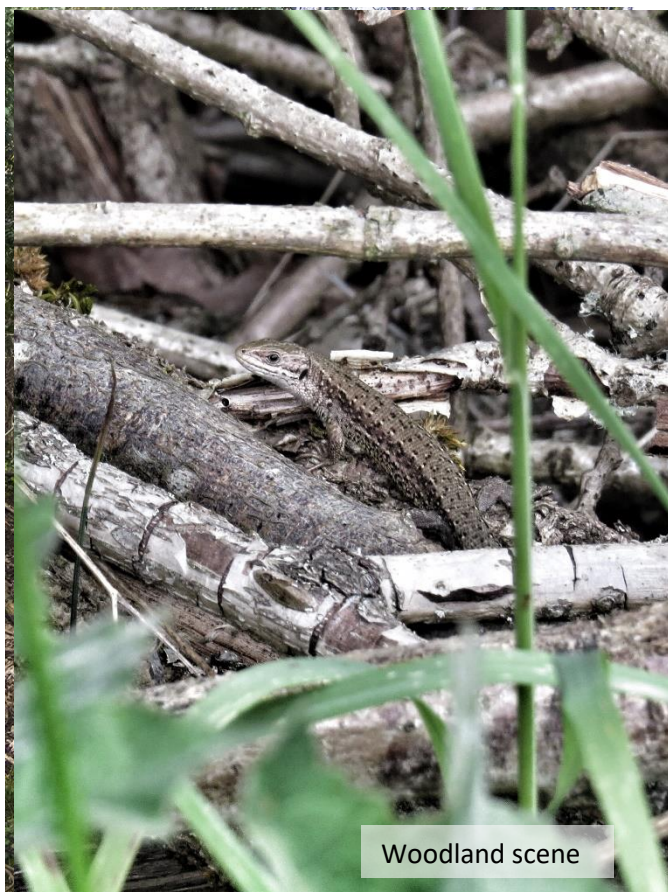
The Wealden Wildwood, as outlined in the Kent Tree Strategy, aims to plant and maintain at least 4579 hectares of new native woodland, focussed on the confluence of the Greensand Ridge and the Low Weald by 2044. As this area falls largely into Maidstone Borough, the council and local landowners have a key role to play in the instigation and delivery of this project. Potential Partners: Maidstone Borough Council, Woodland Trust, local landowners.

For more detail, please see the Kent Tree Strategy (Butfoy, et al., 2019).

#### 2. Heathland Corridor

A corridor connecting the heathland remnants from Maidstone to Ashford, working in partnership with Ashford Borough Council. This area is highly fragmented due to development, including the M20, A20 and HS1 trainline and so the protection of the remaining remnants, and sympathetic management of intermediate land is vital. Potential Partners: Maidstone Borough Council, Ashford Borough Council, Kent Wildlife Trust.

For more information on heathland in Maidstone, please see Section 8.



Woodland scene

on lizard

## Projects to Reduce Environmental Damage

### 3. Medway River Against Plastics

A project focussing on reducing the plastic pollution in the River Medway is in its development stage by Medway Valley Countryside Partnership. The initial phase of the project aims to engage locals with litter collecting events and investigating the litter types, entry points and hotspots of plastic waste in the river Medway. The second phase of the project will include the installation of in-channel litter collectors to remove plastics from the river. This project will benefit people and wildlife locally and reduce harm downstream. Potential Partners: Maidstone Borough Council, Medway Valley Countryside Partnership, South East Rivers Trust, Environment Agency, volunteers, local schools.

### 4. Climate Resilience through Natural Solutions

Long-term ongoing work to increase the borough's climate resilience must be a priority. By working across sectors and departments, the Council should investigate natural solutions to mitigating against the impacts of the climate crisis and reducing our local contributions to greenhouse gases. A key aspect of this will include large-scale tree planting (which overlaps with Project 1 – Wealden Wildwood) and urban tree planting (utilising the government's Urban Tree Challenge Fund). Potential Partners: Maidstone Brough Council, Kent County Council, Countryside Management Partnerships, Woodland Trust.

## Projects to Support Delivery

### 5. Creation of Interactive Digital Mapping Interface

Several stakeholders showed interest in an interactive online map that land managers could use to guide their land management. Residents, businesses and land managers could use the map to identify local greenspaces, local environmental groups and volunteering opportunities, local habitat types, and where to go for advice on the type of land you are interested in. This would expand upon work being undertaken as part of the Go Green Go Wild project.

### 6. Maidstone Borough Council Implementation Plan and Yearly Reporting

Maidstone Borough Council will identify resources (including staff and capacity) to implement the strategy and these projects and will publish this in 2020, followed by yearly progress reports against targets and timelines. Consulted stakeholders frequently supported this as a suggested project.



Riverside scene



## 10. Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all the local stakeholders who fed into this strategy, especially those groups run by volunteers.

Consulted stakeholders include:

- Andrew Williams, Daniel Pease and Victoria Holloway of Maidstone Borough Council
- Broomfield and Kingswood Parish Council
- Bryn Cornwell of Loose Valley Conservation Strategy
- Chart Sutton Parish Council
- Derek Whitehead of Friends of Whatman Park
- Detling Parish Council
- Harrietsham Parish Council
- John Callahan of Fant Wildlife Trust
- John Harrison of Savills (management of Kirkwood Trust)
- Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre
- Lesley Mason of the Environment Agency
- Louise Butfoy and Tony Harwood of Kent County Council
- Mark Gallant of North West Kent Countryside Partnership
- Mark Pritchard of Medway Valley Countryside Partnership
- Paul Harper, Bob Hinder and Paul Wilby of Maidstone Borough Council
- Richard Bloor of Kent Wildlife Trust
- Sharon Blackwood of Bearsted Woodland Trust
- Shaun Caudwell and co., Hollingbourne Meadows Trust
- Staplehurst Parish Council
- Steve Mumford of Boughton Monchelsea Amenity Group
- The Green Drinks Maidstone group
- The Woodland Trust
- Ulcombe Parish Council
- Vanessa Jones of Bredhurst Woodland Action Group
- Yalding Parish Council

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*

Margaret Mead



## 11. Bibliography

AECOM for Maidstone Borough Council, 2016. *Habitats Regulations Assessment for: Maidstone Borough Council*

AECOM, 2015. *A Natural Capital Asset Check for Kent*

ARCH, 2012. *Kent Habitat Survey 2012*

Butfoy, L. et al., 2019. *25 Year Kent Tree Strategy*

Charter for Trees, Woods and People, 2019. *The Tree Charter*. [Online]

Available at: <https://treecharter.uk/home.html>

[Accessed 29 08 2019].

Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010. *Aichi Biodiversity Targets*. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

[Accessed 22 03 2019].

Defra and Natural England, 2013. *Biodiversity Offsetting*. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/biodiversity-offsetting>

[Accessed 22 03 2019].

Defra and the Environment Agency, 2015. *Water for life and livelihoods: Part 1: Thames river basin district River basin management plan*

Defra, 2011. *Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services*

Defra, 2011. *Enabling the transition to a Green Economy*, HM Government.

Defra, 2011. *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*, HM Government.

Defra, 2011. *Water for Life*, HM Government.

Defra, 2018. *A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment*, HM Government.

Defra, 2018. *Net Gain Consultation proposals*, HM Government.

Defra, 2019. *Draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill*, DEFRA.

England Biodiversity Group, 2011. *ThinkBIG: How and why landscape-scale conservation benefits wildlife, people and the wider economy*, England Biodiversity Group.

Environment Agency and Natural England, 2018. *Improving the River Beult for People and Wildlife*.

Environmental Audit Committee, 2018. *Committee calls for new Environmental Enforcement and Audit Office*. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/news-parliament-2017/governments-25-year-plan-report-publication-17-19/>

[Accessed 22 03 2019].

Exeter City Council, 2010. *Residential Design Supplementary Planning Document*

Freshwater Habitats Trust, 2019. *Freshwater Habitats Trust - Habitats - Pond*. [Online]  
Available at: <https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/habitats/pond/>  
[Accessed 23 08 2019].

Friends of the Earth, 2019.

Green Infrastructure Partnership, n.d. *Green Infrastructure Partnership*. [Online]  
Available at: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/category/green-infrastructure-partnership>  
[Accessed 22 03 2019].

Griffiths, A. & Loos, M., 2018. *South East RIMP*

Hayhow, D. et al., 2016. *State of Nature 2016*, The State of Nature partnership

IPBES, 2019. *Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*

Jacobs and Maidstone Borough Council, 2013. *Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment*

Jacobs for Maidstone Borough Council, 2015. *Maidstone Landscape Capacity Study: Sensitivity Assessment*

Kent Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, 1997. *Kent Biodiversity Action Plan*

Kent County Council, 2018. *Kent and Medway Growth Infrastructure Framework*

Kent Nature Partnership, 2015. *Kent Biodiversity 2020 and beyond - a strategy for the natural environment 2015-2025*

Kent Nature Partnership, 2015. *Kent Biodiversity Strategy - Kent Biodiversity Opportunity Areas*. [Online]  
Available at: [://www.kentnature.org.uk/kent-biodiversity-strategy2.html](http://www.kentnature.org.uk/kent-biodiversity-strategy2.html)  
[Accessed 02 09 2019].

Lake Market Research for Maidstone Borough Council, 2015. *Open Spaces Survey Report*

Lawton, J. et al., 2010. *Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network*

Loose Parish Council, F. U., 2018. *Neighbourhood Plan Submission Version*

Maidstone Borough Council, 2008. *Maidstone's Biodiversity Strategy: A Local Biodiversity Action Plan*

Maidstone Borough Council, 2010. *Maidstone Town Air Quality Action Plan*

Maidstone Borough Council, 2012. *Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment Supplement*

Maidstone Borough Council, 2014. *Green and Blue Spaces Provision in Maidstone Borough Quantitative Assessment*

Maidstone Borough Council, 2015. *Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan - Planning Evidence*. [Online]  
Available at: [http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/106991/Map-of-Natural-Open-Spaces-Buffered-to-300m-2015.pdf](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/106991/Map-of-Natural-Open-Spaces-Buffered-to-300m-2015.pdf)  
[Accessed 22 03 2019].



Maidstone Borough Council, 2015. *Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan - Planning Evidence*. [Online]  
Available at: [http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/106990/Map-of-Natural-Open-Spaces-Buffered-to-2km-2015.pdf](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/106990/Map-of-Natural-Open-Spaces-Buffered-to-2km-2015.pdf)  
[Accessed 22 03 2019].

Maidstone Borough Council, 2016. *Maidstone Borough Local Plan Infrastructure Delivery Plan*

Maidstone Borough Council, 2017. *Maidstone Borough Local Plan*

Maidstone Borough Council, 2018. *Protection of the Greensand Ridge - Report*

Marden Parish Council, 2019. *Marden Neighbourhood Plan 2017-2031*

Marmot, M. et al., 2010. *Fair Society, Healthy Lives - Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England Post-2010*, The Marmot Review.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019. *National Planning Policy Framework*

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019. *National Planning Policy Framework*

Natural England, Defra and Environment Agency, 2019. *Catchment Sensitive Farming*. [Online]  
Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/catchment-sensitive-farming-reduce-agricultural-water-pollution>

Natural England, Defra and Environment Agency, 2019. *Catchment Sensitive Farming: reduce water and air pollution*. [Online]  
Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/catchment-sensitive-farming-reduce-agricultural-water-pollution#find-out-if-your-lands-in-a-high-priority-area>  
[Accessed 02 09 2019].

Natural England, 2009. *Environmental impacts of land management*

Natural England, 2016. *Conservation 2*

Natural England, 2018. *Catchment Sensitive Farming: reduce water and air pollution*. [Online]  
Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/catchment-sensitive-farming-reduce-agricultural-water-pollution>  
[Accessed 22 03 2019].

Natural England, 2019. *Natural England Blog: Clean Air Day*. [Online]  
Available at: <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2019/06/20/clean-air-day/>  
[Accessed 27 July 2019].

Natural England, 2019. *Protecting great crested newts*. [Online]  
Available at: <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2019/03/11/protecting-great-crested-newts/>  
[Accessed 22 03 2019].

North Loose Neighbourhood Plan Group, 2013. *North Loose Neighbourhood Development Plan 2015-2031*

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Defra, 2005. *Government Circular: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and their Impact within the Planning System*, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Defra, 2005. *Government Circular: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and their Impact within the Planning System*, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Oxford City Council, 2019. *Technical Advice Note: Biodiversity*

Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2006. *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act*

Reeve, M. J., 2014. *Agricultural Land Classification Survey of Potential development sites in Maidstone borough*

RSPB, 2019. *Kingsbrook, a new era in wildlife-friendly housing*. [Online]  
Available at: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/projects/kingsbrook-housing/>  
[Accessed 02 08 2019].

Sansum, P., MckErnan, P. & Westaway, S., 2012. *A revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory for Maidstone borough, Kent*

Staplehurst Parish Council, 2016. *Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2031*

The Kent Habitat Survey Partnership, 2003. *Kent Habitat Survey 2003*, Kent County Council.

The Law Commission, 2014. *Conservation Covenants*,

The State of Nature partnership, 2016. *The State of Nature 2016*

UK Parliament, 2019. *UK Parliament - Glossary*. [Online]  
Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/white-paper/>  
[Accessed 02 09 2019].

UNEP-WCMC, 2014. *UK National Ecosystem Assessment*

University of Exeter, 2018. *Natural Environment Online tool (NEVO)*. [Online]  
Available at: <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/leep/research/nevo/>  
[Accessed 22 03 2019].

Woodland Trust, 2019. *Ivy (Hedera helix)*. [Online]  
Available at: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/trees-woods-and-wildlife/plants-and-fungi/woodland-wildflowers/ivy/>  
[Accessed 08 29 2019].

## Appendix A

# Biodiversity in the Planning Process

## A Guidance Note for Planners and Developers

This document forms part of the Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy and is designed to primarily advise planners. It may also be of use to those applying for planning permission or working in construction and development. It will also be of use to parish councils who are writing Local Plans for their parish.

Before using this guidance note, readers should be familiar with the concepts of biodiversity, natural capital and ecosystem services (discussed in the first half of the Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy). This document should be used in conjunction with local information on the natural environment (found throughout the second half of the Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy).

### Why do planners need to consider biodiversity?

#### National Policy

- Local Authorities have a duty to conserve biodiversity under Section 40 of the **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act** which states:  
*“Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. Where conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat.”* (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2006)
- The **National Planning Policy Framework** (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019) requires the planning system to protect and enhance the natural environment. Section 15 ‘Conserving and enhancing the natural environment’ provides further specific guidance including:  
*“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils [...and...] minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;”*
- **The Lawton Review** - a government review of the UK’s ecological network (Lawton, et al., 2010) - found that there is a need to increase the knowledge of the biodiversity duty amongst local authorities. This document and the Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy should provide further information on this for planners. The review also stated that planning policy and practice should provide greater protection to priority habitats and features that form part of ecological networks, particularly Local Wildlife Sites and ancient woodland. (Lawton, et al., 2010)
- **Government Circular 06/2005** (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation) places statutory obligations on Local Planning Authorities, detailing how ecological assessments must be considered within the planning process. Paragraph 99 sets out how the presence of protected species must be established before planning permission is granted. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Defra, 2005)
- The **British Standard on Biodiversity** (BS42020) sets standards for assessment of biodiversity within the planning process. All ecological reports submitted as part of planning applications must be prepared to standards set within this code of practice. Accordingly, all planners must be familiar with, and have access to, this document.

## Local Policy

The Maidstone Local Plan (Maidstone Borough Council, 2017) provides obligation for planners to consider biodiversity. It states:

- *“Development schemes will be expected to contribute towards improved connectivity through the provision of space for nature that contributes to the large landscape-scale pattern of connected habitat”*
- *“Developers will also be expected to provide detail of how GBI [Green and Blue Infrastructure] elements including sites managed for biodiversity will be managed and maintained over the long term”*

The Kent Tree Strategy (Butfoy, et al., 2019) further supports the need for planners to consider biodiversity and the natural environment throughout the planning process, including responsibilities of the planning authorities such as ensuring the projection of irreplaceable ancient woodland.

## Overarching Principles for Considering Biodiversity in Planning:

### 1. Incorporate biodiversity from the beginning

It is important to consider biodiversity at the earliest possible stage of the development process. This will help to ensure that the impacts of a scheme on biodiversity are fully considered and to put appropriate measures in place. Biodiversity should be incorporated at design stage and considered an asset rather than a constraint, providing valuable spaces for people and wildlife within a high quality development.

### 2. Incorporate biodiversity into all areas of a development

Space for nature needs to be integrated into the design of all areas, not just designated natural spaces. This is key to providing the scale of habitat creation needed to conserve our wildlife.

### 3. Use conditions to ensure delivery of biodiversity benefits

In some cases it will be necessary to use planning conditions to enforce delivery of biodiversity benefits and working methods. If conditions are used to secure protection or enhancement of biodiversity, systems must be put in place and will be enforced in a timely manner by the local planning authority to ensure these have been followed, via inspection or reporting.

### 4. Follow the Lawton principles in the creation of wildlife areas

The Lawton principles state that we need more areas managed for nature, that they need to be large, well connected and well managed (Lawton, et al., 2010). If new wildlife areas are to be created, a management plan should be provided which demonstrates that the land will continue to provide benefits to biodiversity in the future. Wildlife areas created as part of a development or as compensation must be sustainable, and the management plan should demonstrate how the maintenance and long-term management will be funded.

### 5. Follow the “Mitigation Hierarchy”

The mitigation hierarchy discusses how to minimise harm to biodiversity. It is partially superseded by the need to provide Biodiversity Net Gain, as this creates the need for developments to benefit biodiversity overall, not just to minimise damage. The following hierarchy should be followed: avoid harm, minimise damage if harm unavoidable, restore and compensate for losses, then if necessary, offset at a larger scale than the losses. This allows for uncertainty and time lags inherent in creating compensatory habitat.

## The planning process should permit developments which achieve the following:

### 1. Provide Biodiversity Net Gain

Developments should provide net gain in biodiversity and natural capital on site, with consideration to the ecological context of the site. Proposals should also consider impact on wider environment via changes in ecosystem services as a result of the development. Support shall be given to such proposals. This is supported by National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 109 (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019). Opportunities for net gain can be found in Section 12 of the Biodiversity Technical Advice Note of Oxford City Council (Oxford City Council, 2019).

### 2. Provide Natural Capital Net Gain

Large development proposals should include detailed assessment of existing natural capital and scope to provide natural capital net gain. This is supported by National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 109 which states that “the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological consideration interests and soils, recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services and remediating and mitigating degraded etc land” (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019).

### 3. Protect and Create wildlife corridors

Wildlife corridors should be protected from development proposals that would result in their loss or harm to their quality, extent or functioning. Large developments should create wildlife corridors around and through their sites, taking local habitats into consideration. The planning department should work alongside other departments to utilise the potential of canals, railways, roads, cycle ways and other linear features to be wildlife corridors.

## Advice for Parish Councils

Neighbourhood Plans should follow the guidance and principles set out above. The Marden Neighbourhood Plan is a good local example of how biodiversity can be incorporated throughout the plan. It includes information and policies on sustainable construction, soil conservation, biodiversity net gain, habitat conservation and biodiversity opportunities through water management. (Marden Parish Council, 2019)

## Further guidance

Useful technical advice can be found in the government circular on Biodiversity and geological conservation. This document includes guidance on making decisions regarding species and habitats in development, and relevant links to European law. Much of the technical detail in here may be of use to planners making decisions on wildlife sites. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Defra, 2005)

The Oxford City Council Biodiversity Technical Advice Note expands upon the information provided here and also provides information on how to provide space for wildlife within the built environment. (Oxford City Council, 2019). Similarly, the Exeter Design Guide’s section on biodiversity (appendix 2) provides further useful information. (Exeter City Council, 2010)

## Appendix 2 : Officer recommendation & responses to Biodiversity & Climate Emergency Working Group Observations

	Summary Observation from Working group	Recommendations
<b>1 Executive Summary</b>	<p>1.1 &amp; 1.2 Vision statement and increased period to 25 years</p> <p>1.3 &amp; 1.4 Holistic approach should be emphasised restoring natural processes &amp; fragmentation of landscapes. Including a holistic approach to townscape too. Habitats should not be the focus</p> <p>1.5 Title could be 'Maidstone Biodiversity &amp; Biomass Strategy', emphasis on importance of quantity of living material (mass) as well as diversity.</p> <p>1.6 Expand to include contractors and partner organisation</p> <p>1.7 The 2019 State of Nature Report should be referenced</p> <p>Case Study suggestion: Wildwood &amp; Wetland Connect – proposal for Strategy to promote an ambitious proposal to expand tree cover &amp; re-naturalisation of water courses over 200 year timescale.</p>	<p>1.1 Agreed 1.2 10 year strategy proposed</p> <p>1.3 &amp; 1.4 Agreed – ambitions for land &amp; townscape will be incorporated but a number of responses from workshop and engagement highlighted the desire to maintain basic descriptors of habitats to make biodiversity accessible – this strategy has evolved from the 2008 Plan that cited 15 habitat types for action.</p> <p>1.5 There is potential for confusion; few people know the term biomass and the majority who are familiar with it are referencing material as a source of fuel. Document was entitled 'Saving Nature in Maidstone' to be accessible and attention grabbing.</p> <p>1.6 Duty of care exists in law – this will be made clear in document.</p> <p>1.7 Agreed</p> <p>Case study suggestion: Further discussion required to establish status of project, is it a case study or a future action point?</p>
<b>2 Why do we need a biodiversity Strategy?</b>	<p>2.1 – 2.6 Request to emphasise that shifting baseline of accepting recent poor diversity, quality &amp; quantity as a reference point stifles ambition. Also typo noted.</p>	<p>2.1 Noted and statement will be incorporated.</p>
<b>3 What are the aims of this strategy?</b>	<p>3.1 &amp; 3.2 Request for statement/vision to underpin the strategy and suggestion governance, resources and accountability are incorporated in this section.</p>	<p>3.1 &amp; 3.2 Vision statement will be restated here. Governance will be expressed within Strategy.</p>
<b>4 Ecosystem</b>	<p>4.1- 4.6 Suggestions to improve examples of Ecosystems Services</p>	<p>4.1-4.6 Agreed and will be incorporated</p>

<b>Services</b>	4.7 Ea map	
<b>5 Pressures on Wildlife</b>	<p>5.1 – 5.1.6 Suggestions for more local examples of development gains for wildlife.</p> <p>5.1.7 reference Honeyhills Wood</p> <p>5.2.1 – 5.2.4 Pollution Issues – expand section to reflect breadth of problems.</p> <p>5.3 Invasive Non-Native Species – reduce section or delete as felt the species list was subjective and misleading. The importance of native species is made and the need to understand the risks of introduced species and pathogens. Also highlighted is the risks of dogs and cats to biodiversity.</p>	<p>5.1-5.1.6 Agreed to incorporate local examples.</p> <p>5.1.7 Agreed</p> <p>5.2.1 – 5.2.4 Expand section to reflect range of pollution issues: action plan to identify priority areas.</p> <p>5.3 The section is relevant and should be retained as it specifically relates to <b>Invasive</b> species and reflects the 2018 Regional Invasive Alien Species Management Plan. Table 2 will be edited to clarify presence /absence. Working group comments relate to non-native species whilst an interesting narrative not entirely relevant when this section is focussing on species known to be 'Invasive'.</p>
<b>6 How can I help?</b>	<p>6.1 – 6.2.2 Request to state businesses, landowners, farmers and land managers rather than current statement of 'people across sectors.' Pledge to be called Maidstone Nature Pledge rather than Biodiversity Nature Pledge.</p> <p>6.3.1 Information on funding sources</p> <p>6.4.1 Partnership Working – request to expand list</p>	<p>6.1 – 6.2.2 Agreed</p> <p>6.3.1 Information is presented in Appendix 2, addendum required in text.</p> <p>6.4.1 Current list reflects those who have currently expressed an interest not those that we wish were engaged. Additional text to be inserted referencing Go Green Go Wild and opportunities to expand influence to broader set of partners.</p>
<b>7 What will MBC do ?</b>	7.1 Strong support and request for more detail on delivery.	7.1 Noted and detail on delivery will be expressed in Action Plan
<b>8 What have</b>	8.1 Misleading statement & suggestion of additional species of note	8.1 Clarify statement to make it explicit that Maidstone makes a

<p><b>we got in Maidstone?</b></p>	<p>and habitats.</p> <p>8.2 Concern that Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA) do not reflect the local nor urban opportunities and 'Whole Borough Mapping Exercise' could be undertaken to identify opportunities. In particular the local potential along the urban Len Valley and the Loose area. Proposal that the Strategy focuses on trees/woodland and wetlands as the greatest potential to increase landscape scale biodiversity improvements.</p> <p>8.3 Species of Note. Strong dislike of presentation of species data gathered in the borough as not scientifically rigorous. Suggestion to include the promotion of other wildlife campaigns.</p>	<p>significant contribution to the listed statistics of species &amp; habitats of international importance. Additional notable species and ancient woodland summary data will be added.</p> <p>8.2 The Kent BOAs exist in the Kent Nature Partnership frameworks and are referenced to reflect the existing regional position - a new local borough exercise could be undertaken as an outcome in the action plan or known additional opportunities such as the urban River Len and Loose area included now.</p> <p>8.3 Data is validated and has value in a representation of 'citizen science'. Recommend it is retained to express interest and engagement that already exists but further clarify limitations. The Kent Nature Partnership selected the priority species and the ongoing call for submission of amateur naturalist or citizen science data is cost effective and a tool for engaging with a new audience. Recommend data is retained within strategy as an appendix. Other campaigns will be promoted.</p>
<p><b>9 Habitats</b></p>	<p>9.1 A call for ambitious re-wilding and landscape scale project for Maidstone. Creation of wilderness and support for keystone species</p> <p>9.4 Suggested case study of 3500 acres Knepp Estate, West Sussex</p> <p>9.5 Caingorms Connect Case Study</p> <p>9.6 Request to amend/redefine the Kent Habitat Survey (KHS) categories to closely reflect that found in Maidstone</p>	<p>9.1 Re-wilding could have major biodiversity gains, but it is not yet policy and is fraught with legal challenges. Nor is there a likely opportunity within the borough. This will need to be held over for future strategy or action plan.</p> <p>9.4 See above</p> <p>9.5 See above and additionally examples from lowland England would be most relevant</p> <p>9.6 The KHS categories are used across the region and furthermore are shown only to illustrate the broad categories now expressed in the Strategy ie Woodland, Wetland, Urban &amp; Grassland/Agriculture. Previous comments have supported the move away from a focus on the many types of habitat classifications and sub-classification</p>



	<p>9.7 Request for biodiversity/biomass comparative study data to illustrate the merits of natural climax woodland and wetland habitats.</p> <p>9.8 Cairngorms Connect – use high quality images and bold statements to illustrate concepts</p>	<p>available to us. Recommend retaining the KHS list.</p> <p>9.7 Question the merits of this exercise as an interesting academic concept rather than an aid to influence policy and practical implementation. Natural climax habitat would require large scale sites with mega-fauna and apex predators; not likely in Maidstone.</p> <p>9.8 Agreed</p>
<b>10 Woodland</b>	<p>10.1 .1 Request to reference the importance of protecting and expanding certain woodlands</p> <p>10.1.2 Practical suggestions /interventions for woodland management</p> <p>10.1.3 Suggestion for further case study: Wealden Wildwood</p> <p>10.1.4 Scramblers &amp; climbers</p> <p>10.1.5 Game shooting issues &amp; management of woodlands</p>	<p>10.1.1 Strategy has referenced woodlands in trust or public ownership – very little opportunity to influence private landowners.</p> <p>10.1.2 Can be incorporated into Actions &amp; delivery</p> <p>10.1.3 For brevity and conscious of document size not all case studies included.</p> <p>10.1.4 More relevant for actions rather than strategy</p> <p>10.1.5 Do not agree this is a strategically important outcome; could be addressed as an action to support national initiatives with BASC.</p>
<b>11 Urban Nature</b>	<p>11.2.1 – 11.2.2 Suggestion to expand content regarding connecting residents to nature and proposals for management prescriptions for towns and villages.</p>	<p>11.2.1-11.2.1 Agree but would more naturally sit in a follow-on action plan highlighting to the decision makers &amp; residents what can be done to help and how this will aid nature and personal physical and mental wellbeing.</p>
<b>12 Water &amp; Wetlands</b>	<p>12.3.1 Query why advocating removal of fish pass at Yalding</p> <p>12.3.2 Removal of man-made obstacles and re-naturalisation of water courses</p>	<p>12.3.1 Agreed – though this was taken from the Maidstone Infrastructure Delivery Plan – recommend this is investigated and not repeating an error.</p> <p>12.3.2 This is already national policy and an EA objective driven by Water Framework Directive (WFD)so strategically covered</p>

	<p>12.3.3 Green &amp; Blue Infrastructure Delivery Plan – flawed.</p> <p>12.3.4 Re-naturalising catchment</p> <p>12.3.5 Low flows, enforcement &amp; abstraction</p> <p>12.3.6 Pond creation targets</p> <p>12.3.7 Groundwater recharge &amp; quality</p> <p>12.3.8 Marsh frog</p> <p>12.3.9 Hammer Stream photograph</p> <p>12.3.10 Invasive species comment &amp; banner</p>	<p>elsewhere. Where MBC can lead or enable actions this will be captured in the action/delivery plan.</p> <p>12.3.3 It exists and is still a strategic document and it is appropriate to reference it.</p> <p>12.3.4 See 12.3.2 above</p> <p>12.3.5 See 12.3.2</p> <p>12.3.6 Incorporate targets in action plan - work is already happening in partnership with Natural England but space constraints mean we cannot list every initiative currently under way.</p> <p>12.3.7 Embedded within WFD, ( See 12.3.2 above ) but a line for ground water quality in Kent would, we agree, be relevant.</p> <p>12.3.8 Remove reference</p> <p>12.3.9 Replace with River Len photo</p> <p>12.3.10 Remove</p>
<b>13 Grassland &amp; Agriculture</b>	<p>13.4.1 -13.4.2 Request to include Boxley Warren LNR and Marden Meadow as exemplar sites</p> <p>13.4.3 Commentary on limitations of hay/wildflower meadows for invertebrates.</p> <p>13.4.4 Decline in rabbit population</p> <p>13.4.5 Use of wormers</p>	<p>13.4.1 – 13.4.2 Agreed</p> <p>13.4.3 This is a specific technical comment relating to invertebrates and does not consider comparative merits of diverse created meadow with for example amenity turf. Nor the benefits for mammals, farmland birds &amp; raptors. Indeed, the B-Lines South East (Buglife Uk) project promoted in comments is specifically about the creation of new flower rich habitats for pollinator species. The strategy is trying to encourage more active appropriate management of grassland. Arguably optimum management would include extensive grazing by cattle, but this is often not feasible owing to cost, logistics and availability of animals.</p> <p>13.4.4 Not strategic, too specific and unable to influence outcome</p> <p>13.4.5 Very specific but comment can be inserted</p>

<b>14 Projects &amp; Summary</b>	14.1 Potential project partners/delivery agents	14.1 Projects & potential will follow in action/delivery plan. The authors contacted many conservation organisations during the production of this document, without specific objectives, sites and initiatives in mind, they cannot all be listed. They could be referenced under relevant bodies.
<b>15 Other</b>	15.1 Governance, targets and milestones 15.2 Appearance – high quality finish requested	15.1 To be expressed at next iteration; targets will form part of action/delivery plan 15.2 Layout & graphics will be reviewed for professional print publication and online version.

**Biodiversity and Climate Emergency Working Group – Observations on Draft  
Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy**

**Introduction:**

The following observations are offered on the draft Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy by the all-party Maidstone Borough Council Biodiversity and Climate Emergency Working Group.

**1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. It is strongly recommended that the Executive Summary and Strategy opens with a bold, urgent and ambitious ‘vision’ setting out where Maidstone Borough Council aspires to be in 25 years in terms of biomass, biodiversity and environmental services. The vision within the Kent Environment Strategy Tree Strategy could potentially be adapted to fit this purpose.
- 1.2. The Executive Summary and Strategy proposes a five-year (2020-25) lifetime for the document. The Working Group contends that the document must have the more realistic and meaningful timeline of 25 years, thus mirroring the Defra 25 Year Environment Plan and Kent Environment Strategy Tree Strategy (2019-44). More ambitiously, the Strategy timeline could reflect long term vision espoused by the ‘best practice’ Cairngorms Connect initiative and instead span a 200-year timeframe.
- 1.3. The Executive Summary and Strategy should prioritise first and foremost a holistic and overarching aim to restore natural processes and re-connect our fragmented landscape. This approach reflects latest science and similar strategies in Continental Europe and North America and will benefit both biodiversity and biomass. This approach will also ensure local landscapes and communities are more resilient to climate change impacts and will maximise atmospheric carbon and other pollutant sequestration.
- 1.4. The sub-division of the document into sections dealing with discrete habitat types such as woodland, urban nature, water & wetland and grassland & agriculture and agriculture brings a risk that the land and townscape of the Borough will continue to be considered as atomised and a series of ‘habitat islands’ rather than as a dynamic and interconnected whole. The clear priority for the Strategy must therefore be unashamedly holistic i.e. seeking restoration of natural processes and the reconnection of the entire landscape and townscape as a mosaic of semi-natural and man-made habitats. Specific habitat types should be strictly subordinate to landscape-wide restoration and reconnection. Indeed, a mosaic of habitats and ecotones is significantly more valuable for biodiversity and biomass than single habitat blocks.
- 1.5. The accelerating decline in the UK’s biomass is as significant as the decline in its biodiversity and should therefore be addressed robustly within the Executive Summary and wider Strategy (and perhaps also in the title i.e. the **Maidstone Biodiversity and Biomass Strategy**). Further, healthy and wildlife-rich habitats (i.e. those supporting a greater biomass)

are far more resilient to severe weather, disease and other impacts and deliver more environmental services than do more impoverished ecosystems.

- 1.6. The Executive Summary and Strategy should be expanded to address all areas of Council and contractor policy and practice with the potential to impact biodiversity and biomass (not just the 'usual suspect' planning and parks), including pesticide and other chemical use, grass and hedge cutting, artificial lighting (commercial, residential and highway), dog control policy, gritting, waste water and run-off management and MBC estate maintenance.
- 1.7. The 2019 UK State of Nature report was issued since this draft was completed and should be referenced within the final version of the Strategy. The latest report majors on biomass declines and evidences the fact that almost one in five plants are now classified as being at risk of extinction, along with 15% of fungi and lichens, 40% of vertebrates and 12% of invertebrates. The Strategy should cite the new research featured in the report on the fall in biomass in the UK, or "great thinning", which identifies 60% of conservation priority species as having declined since 1970. The report quotes a 13% decline in the average abundance of all species studied.

**Case study:** The Biodiversity and Climate Change Working Group has framed a proposal for an ambitious Maidstone Borough "Wildwood and Wetlands Connect" initiative as part of their evolving Action Plan. Such an initiative would deliver optimal environmental services through climate change mitigation and adaptation alongside a biodiversity gain. The initiative would seek systematic expansion and connection of tree cover and re-naturalisation of water courses over a 200-year timescale and be an exemplar in a South East England context. It is vital that the Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy promotes and supports initiatives as headline grabbing and ambitious as the Wealden Wildwood.

## **2. Why do we need a biodiversity strategy?**

- 2.1 A specific new section on the unfolding loss of biomass, or the 'great thinning' of nature, should be incorporated into this section. One recent study from Germany indicated flying insect biomass declines of some 6% year on year. Invertebrate biomass collapse has been directly linked to declines in UK bird populations in other research.
- 2.2 There has been much coverage in the press of the passing of formerly commonplace natural phenomena such as 'moth snowstorms' in car headlights and once frequent insects 'splats' on windscreens. Locally, just two decades ago descriptions of Brenchley Garden in Maidstone emphasised how the Garden throng with pigeons, crows, seagulls and smaller birds every day, but it is now is virtually devoid of birdlife. Local people also remember hedgehogs and frogs in Brenchley Garden, but with the demise of the pond and wilder corners, this former biodiversity vanished. Well-documented in the KCC Local Studies archive are photographs taken in the Maidstone area before World War II, and the advent of frequent mowing, chemical and

fertiliser applications, which evidence the former profusion of biodiversity in the Borough. These evidence local verges, parks and open spaces, which are now developed or closely-mown 'green deserts', as a riot of wildflowers with clouds of butterflies. In terms of the health of local water bodies, both Vinters Park and Mote Park lakes formerly teemed with life until the mid-1980s when their biodiversity and biomass collapsed (the thick white layer of now absent aquatic mollusc shells captured in the bottom silt starkly evidence this abrupt local collapse). Though perhaps the most obvious decline in local biodiversity is the loss of the huge winter flocks of lapwing which frequented agricultural land surrounding Maidstone as recently as the 1970s, including the Low Weald and fields flanking the Ashford and Sittingbourne Roads, but are now completely gone. Similarly, in urban areas house martins and swifts were once locally common up until the 1970s but have now virtually disappeared from our streets.

- 2.3 Therefore, the depressing concept of 'shifting baseline syndrome' must be explained within the Strategy, as we are now accepting of and used to a sterile landscape with a collapsed biodiversity and biomass.
- 2.4 In relation to evidencing the collapse in invertebrate biodiversity and biomass and its knock on for other wildlife, Matt Shardlow at Buglife UK can perhaps provide a succinct precis to address this point.
- 2.5 Overall this section is very good and captures the central significance of a cross-sectoral approach and resilient ecological networks. The whole Strategy must reflect this philosophy.
- 2.6 At the bottom of page 6 'therefore' is missing the 'e'.

### **3. What are the aims of this strategy?**

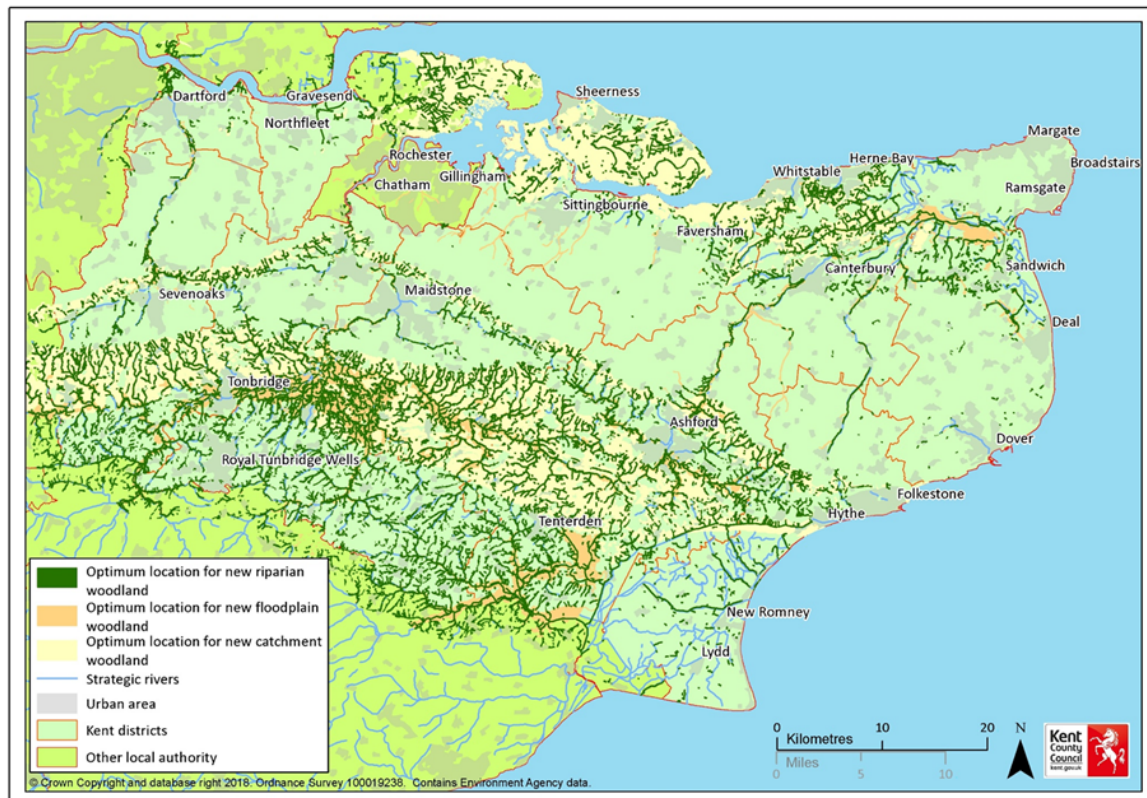
- 3.1 A concise overarching policy statement to underpin the Strategy should be set out at this section (and could be reproduced on the Strategy cover). This could be along the lines of: "A strategic and comprehensive vision, aligned with the Government's 25-year Environment Plan, informing Maidstone Borough Council policy and practice to halt and then reverse local declines in biodiversity and biomass."
- 3.2 Governance hierarchy, staff resources, accountability, targets, key milestones and means of measuring the success or otherwise of this Strategy could perhaps be incorporated into this section.

### **4. Ecosystem Services**

- 4.1 The 'Examples of Ecosystem Services in Maidstone Borough' graphic requires some work including a detailed map of the Borough identifying and explaining habitats which deliver local ecosystem services such as surviving natural floodplains, urban woodland, street trees and natural vegetation cover on our local drinking water aquifers.

## Appendix 3

- 4.2 The Mote Park narrative is missing the word 'as' and should address access to nature, physical health benefits, carbon sequestration, local air quality improvements, biodiversity, groundwater recharge and flood attenuation contribution.
- 4.3 Bredhurst Woods narrative should incorporate groundwater recharge.
- 4.4 Whatman Park narrative should include floodwater storage and enhancement of water quality.
- 4.5 Boxley Warren LNR should be added to the map and reference made to its contribution to groundwater recharge, carbon sequestration, biodiversity and air quality.
- 4.6 On page 10, the Natural Capital Policy box runs off the page.
- 4.7 The Environment Agency map showing optimal locations for new woodland creation to achieve flood attenuation should be incorporated here (please see below).



## 5. Pressures on Wildlife

- 5.1 Conservation/development case studies would be more appropriate if drawn from within Maidstone Borough, for instance the following examples may be worth incorporating into the document:
  - 5.1.1 Berry Gardens at Redwall Lane, where an application for a new commercial premise was balanced by delivery of 25 acres of new wet woodland and ponds.



- 5.1.2 MBC residential extensions SPD is a progressive document including early policy support for integral habitat niches for wildlife within extensions  
[http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/12074/Residential-Extensions-SPD-2009.pdf](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/12074/Residential-Extensions-SPD-2009.pdf)
- 5.1.3 Lilk Meadow at Cross Keys in Bearsted, where a residential development delivered nature reserve and wetland enhancements.
- 5.1.4 River Len in Maidstone, where land was delivered alongside retail and other commercial schemes and restoration achieved by volunteers at no cost to the Council <http://healthsustainabilityplanning.co.uk/flood-risk-reduction-river-len-kent/>
- 5.1.5 Hayle Park at Maidstone delivered a nature reserve as a component of a residential scheme. It is worthy of note that Hayle Park nature reserve is not currently mentioned at all in the Strategy.
- 5.1.6 Knoxbridge Farm at Cranbrook Road in Staplehurst, delivered a significant area of new 'Wealden woodland' as part of a planning permission for a new access.
- 5.1.7 At the second paragraph of 4.1 Honeyhills Wood should be added after the reference to Horish Wood. Further, the landscape fragmentation role of the strategic highway network in Maidstone Borough must be emphasised i.e. the M2, M20, A20, A229 and A249. This will provide an opportunity elsewhere in the document to promote green bridges, which are common across Continental Europe and North America, to mitigate landscape fragmentation.

## **5.2 Pollution**

- 5.2.1 This section should perhaps explicitly reference the Forestry Commission's Woodland Carbon Fund. Maidstone Borough is in a priority area for new woodland creation and the scheme provides financial support for planting, aftercare and infrastructure.
- 5.2.2 Road salt is a significant seasonal pollutant of water courses across the Borough and should be addressed within the Strategy.
- 5.2.3 Diffuse aquatic and atmospheric pollution from agricultural run-off, wastewater, highway drainage and exhaust fumes are a particular problem in Maidstone Borough. Gross nutrient enrichment significantly damages aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity across the Borough and must therefore be a focus for positive action.
- 5.2.4 Artificial lighting has a profoundly negative impact upon nocturnal wildlife in the Borough. Policies to protect and expand 'dark skies', encourage use of red spectrum artificial lighting and tackle sky glow should therefore be a priority within the Strategy.

## **5.3 Invasive Non-native Species**

- 5.3.1 This section should be either removed or shortened considerably as this is complex scientifically and morally controversial topic. In the

unfolding ecological emergency, it has been argued that all biodiversity native, near native or exotic is to be cherished and that climate change impacts will inevitably bring dynamic change to our flora and fauna. Indeed, some of our urban nature reserves already host a dynamic mixture of both native and non-native species. Specific species references proposed are subjective and omit some of the most numerous and ecologically disruptive non-native species such as least duckweed, sweet chestnut, pheasant, rainbow trout and common carp. While other species listed or portrayed in photographs are not even currently found in the UK.

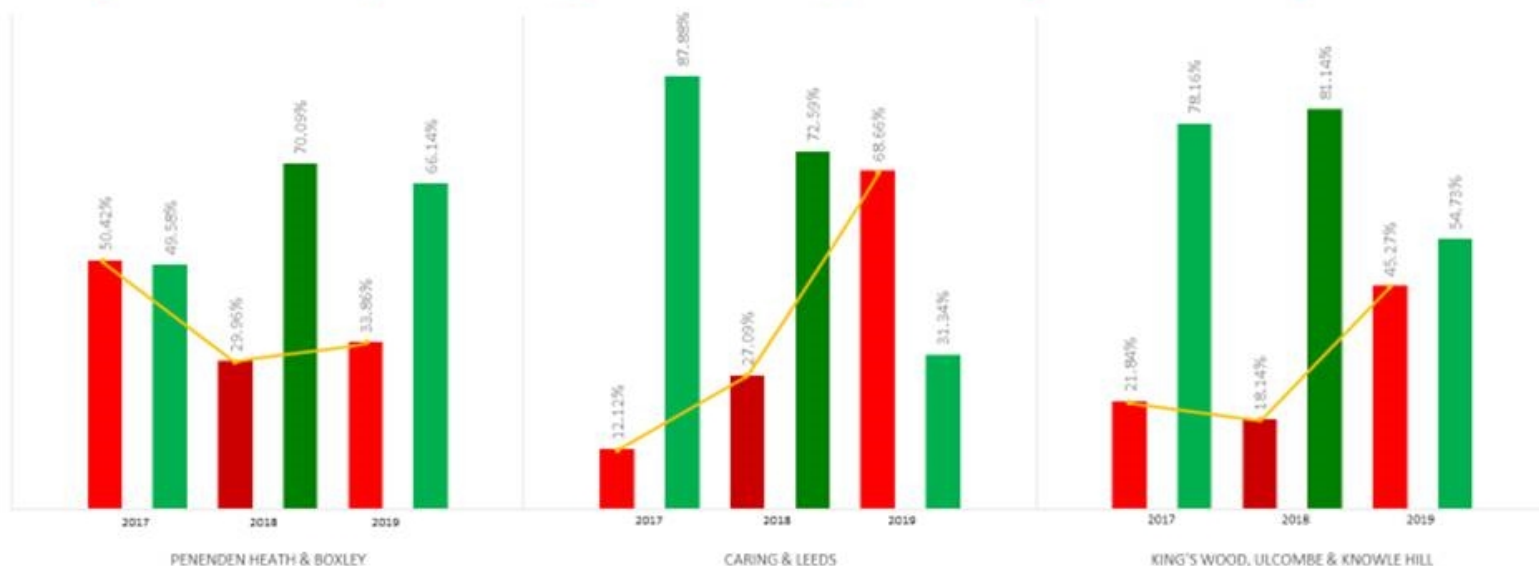
- 5.3.2 All of the tables and photographs should therefore be removed, as they are open to likely damaging misinterpretation or are irrelevant to Maidstone Borough. The contradictions are particularly significant here, as some non-natives, such as brown hare and Roman snail, enjoy legal protection while others bringing more significant ecological benefits, such as European rabbit and sycamore, are persecuted. Indeed, rabbits are a key stone species in the Kent context, which maintain vital vegetation structure complexity on downland and at the woodland edge, provide habitat for other species, through their burrowing, and are a vital food source for many predators. Their serious population declines as a result of habitat loss and disease outbreaks are currently negatively impacting a range of other wildlife from butterflies to stoats.
- 5.3.3 What MBC can and must do is not add to the problem. Maidstone Borough Council should itself plant only native trees and shrubs and condition natives as a component of planning applications in all but exceptional circumstances. Indeed, the Strategy should go further and recommend that new woodland schemes should utilise a sequential approach of natural regeneration, then local provenance seed and cuttings before even considering planting to minimise biosecurity risk and optimise benefits for biodiversity.
- 5.3.4 The following excerpt from the KES Tree Strategy is especially relevant in terms of the rationale for a natives first tree and shrub planting policy:
- “Invasive Tree and Shrub Species - A number of introduced tree and shrub species are colonising semi-natural habitats across Kent. Such non-native species support few of the micro-organisms, fungi, invertebrates and other natural controls which keep native trees and shrubs in balance, although there are a few exceptions to this rule. As a result, they can out-compete indigenous trees and shrubs, with potentially disastrous implications for native wildlife and cherished landscapes. Evidence from Continental Europe indicates that as the climate warms the number of invasive species will increase. A precautionary approach shall therefore be taken, avoiding planting of non-native species which could become tomorrow's invasive species.”
- 5.3.5 This may also be an appropriate point to reference the impact of domestic pets upon biodiversity, as this is an area where MBC has some influence. For example, there is growing evidence that the

presence of dogs at a wildlife conservation site drives down both biodiversity and biomass: “Dog walking caused a 41% reduction in numbers of bird individuals detected and 35% reduction in species richness” (source: Banks P. B. and Bryant J. V. University of New South Wales). This has implication for access policy and management of semi-natural sites. Further, the lethal impact of domestic and feral cats upon birds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates is increasingly well understood. Potential initiatives to influence levels of predation such as encouraging cat owners to keep their animals in overnight and equipping cats with ‘noisy’ collars. Another strand of such a campaign could be promotion of neutering or spaying domestic cats and tough campaigns to capture and neuter/spay feral cat populations in the Borough. Indeed, in a US study feral cats are estimated to be responsible for 2/3rds of the 1-4 billion birds killed by cats in the US each year (source: Smithsonian Institute and US Fish and Wildlife Service). Both urban and rural Maidstone support significant feral cat populations.

- 3.5.6 This section could also reference the very detailed local work carried out by KCC in relation to the introduced fungal pathogen *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* which is devastating European ash in the UK. Scientific data is maintained by KCC mapping the impact of the fungus across tetrads (or 2km squares) in Maidstone Borough. Graphs illustrating the impact and intensity of the outbreak should be reproduced within the Strategy.

PERCENTAGE OF ASH WITH NO SYMPTOMS COMPARISON TO ASH WITH OBSERVED SYMPTOMS SUMMER 2017, 2018 & 2019

■ Symptoms Observed 2017 ■ No Symptoms 2017 ■ Symptoms Observed 2018 ■ No Symptoms 2018 ■ Symptoms Observed 2019 ■ No Symptoms 2019



## 6. How can I Help?

- 6.1. The introductory paragraph must also specifically mention businesses and landowners, crucially including farmers and land managers.
- 6.2 Maidstone Biodiversity Pledge

6.2.1 Consideration should be given for substituting 'Maidstone Biodiversity Pledge' for 'Maidstone Nature Pledge' to make the scheme more accessible and better understood by the public. A recognisable logo would need to be developed so that accreditation could be conferred to MBC services, partners and residents who can evidence effective action for biodiversity with an annual prize for the most innovative and beneficial interventions for nature. Further, specific social media account or area of the MBC website should be developed to promote the pledge and wider Biodiversity Strategy. Sites managed in line with the 'Maidstone Nature Pledge' be it a nature reserve, a park, a garden, a church yard, the grounds of a hotel, office or care home could display a sign advertising their involvement.

6.2.2 The fourth paragraph has a word missing between '..... reputation as much putting up a window box.....'.

### 6.3 Funding Sources

6.3.1 The narrative here describes a list of funding sources but has not actually been incorporated into the draft Strategy. It is worth underlining the fact that funding is not always the key issue and that wildlife friendly actions can often save money and that some of our best local nature reserves have no budget. Indeed, there is a strong argument that too much money can under some circumstances undermine biodiversity aims and undermine the viability of beneficial commercial activity such as coppicing. Perhaps the key area where money is important is when assembling the land portfolio needed for landscape scale re-wilding. Kent County Council's White Horse Wood project is an example of what can be achieved for biodiversity through well-considered investment.

### 6.4 Partnership Working

6.4.1 The list of involved organisations must be made longer, more wide-ranging and hard-hitting (this will require targeted outreach to gain buy-in from larger public and private sector organisations such as KCC, Environment Agency, DHA, Sainsbury, Tesco, Aldi, Scania Group, Gallagher, Leeds Castle Foundation, Highways England, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust, Boxley Parish Council, Staplehurst Parish Council, South East Water, Southern Water and Network Rail and Kent Downs AONB) and other local groups omitted from the list such as Hayle Park Nature Reserve, Vinters Valley Park Local Nature Reserve and Boxley Warren Local Nature Reserve.

## 7. **What will MBC do?**

7.1 The aspirations set out in this section are strongly supported, however, more detail is required in terms of who will lead on implementation (a corporate champion) and how each will be achieved i.e. is it through policy and practice, contractual agreements, campaigns or influence over partners.

## 8. **What have we got in Maidstone?**

8.1 The bullet points at this section are misleading as above them it describes 'those present in Maidstone' but lists all England statistics. Maidstone Borough is still a remarkably biodiverse area of the country and will yield impressive local statistics. For example:

- At least 2,828 ha of ancient woodland survives in Maidstone Borough

Other statistics could be cited on length of watercourses, the complexity of the underlying geology and implications for habitat richness (0map 5 identifying relative plant species biodiversity at page 9 of Eric Philip's New Atlas of the Kent Flora shows Maidstone Borough as having the greatest species richness in Kent context, for example) extent of chalk grassland, ancient and veteran trees and the many notable species resident in the Borough such as DesMoulin's whorl snail, Leisler's and noctule bats, white-clawed crayfish ground pine, bird's-foot, bogbean, native box, lizard orchid, southern marsh-orchid, adder and wild boar.

## **8.2 Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in Maidstone**

8.2.1 'Biodiversity' is spelt wrong on map heading.

8.2.2 Though in existence for many years, the Biodiversity Opportunity Area concept has failed to deliver any gains for biodiversity in Maidstone Borough. Indeed, many of the Opportunity Areas are now effectively built out or converted to intensive agriculture (the Mid Kent Greensand and Gault being a case in point). Instead, a local 'Whole Borough' mapping exercise should be undertaken to identify existing wildlife habitats and opportunity areas to better facilitate expansion and reconnection. This could be achieved through promotion and support for positive changes in land-management and land-use, big or small, and by better utilising the planning system and other policy frameworks to remove or modify damaging activities and obstacles to landscape reconnection.

8.2.3 The Working Group is further concerned that the existing Biodiversity Opportunity Area network omits a number of geographical areas within the Borough with real potential for biodiversity and is uniformly rural in its scope. For example, the Loose and urban stretch of the River Len are already managed for nature to some extent and have real potential for this to increase but are not currently included. Any local replacement must factor-in opportunities for urban and urban-edge habitats and wildlife.

8.2.4 Page 30 - The targets for the key habitats and species within the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas or its local replacement in Maidstone Borough should prioritise recreation, restoration and reconnection of native woodland. Woodland is the natural climax habitat across all but the wettest habitats in the Borough and also supports the greatest biodiversity and biomass.

8.2.5 A massive expansion in well-structured tree cover will be central to achieving a measurable increase in biodiversity and biomass. Grassland in comparison is relatively simple in vegetation structure terms and support a relatively impoverished (if specialist) flora and fauna. Grassland also requires intensive maintenance and delivers few of the environmental services engendered by woodland (and wetland). Achieving a diverse and intimate mosaic of well-structured habitats and ecotones, all connected by trees, woodland and wetland, should be the central mission of the Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy.

The principles of re-wilding, such as the return to the landscape of 'key stone' species to provide dynamic and more natural management interventions, should inform this aspiration to restore a biodiverse, complex and beautiful landscape.

### **8.3 Species of Note**

- 8.3.1 This section should omit the KMBRC records graphs for selected species as the surveys have no scientific controls and are therefore not scientifically reliable or valid, holding the potential for significant inaccuracy and bias. They contribute nothing and are misleading.
- 8.3.2 If survey data is to be featured, it should be scientifically rigorous with controls in place to ensure year on year data is directly comparable.
- 8.3.3 It may therefore be worth establishing controlled annual (2km square) tetrad surveys to monitor the success or otherwise of the Strategy. Kent Field Club and other local wildlife groups as well as 'citizen science' could potentially be engaged in surveys.
- 8.3.4 The reference to hedgehogs in the narrative of this section is an interesting one in terms of stimulating public engagement, as a single species campaign (i.e. flagship species) can, under certain circumstances, benefit wider biodiversity (i.e. umbrella species). Therefore, the Strategy should set out an MBC-led multi-pronged campaign to protect our hedgehogs along the lines of Hedgehog Street, run by the British Hedgehog Preservation Society and Peoples' Trust for Endangered Species. The project could tackle activities which harm hedgehog populations such as use of slug pellets and rodenticide, careless strimmer and mower use, wildlife hazardous highway infrastructure and cattle-grids, and through addressing the over-tidying of urban and rural habitats and creating good new hedgehog habitat in both town and country. The planning system should be used to ensure hedgehog highways and hedgehog friendly landscaping is delivered as a part of all relevant schemes, while local communities could be involved in campaigns to connect their neighbourhoods and improve habitat across gardens and open spaces.
- 8.3.5 Other targeted campaigns worthy of consideration for promotion by the Borough Council and partners include pollinators (potentially through engagement with Buglife UK's B-Lines South East initiative), farmland birds (with BTO and/or RSPB), small mammals ponds and pondlife (potentially through engagement with the Freshwater Habitats Trust Million Ponds initiative), wildlife associated with dead wood (perhaps in partnership with Buglife UK and the Woodland Trust) European eel, common toad (potentially with Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group), adder (potentially with Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group), swift (potentially with swift conservation) and bats (potentially with Kent Bat Group).

### **9. Habitats**

- 9.1 This section should focus primarily upon restoration and reconnection of the wider landscape and incorporate mapping identifying how our

fragmented semi-natural habitats can be re-joined and natural processes restored. The vital importance of achieving complex vegetation structure and a mosaic of habitats and ecotones must be emphasised. The concept of rewilding and key stone wildlife species should also be referenced, a local example which could be replicated in Maidstone Borough is the Wilder Blean Demonstration Project near Canterbury.

- 9.2 Maidstone's Biodiversity Strategy should incorporate progressive and ambitious targets for the re-wilding of wilderness areas. In Germany, the National Strategy on Biological Diversity (NBS) set goals in 2007 for preserving and establishing more wilderness areas (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1617138117302972>). The NBS states that 2% of the national land territory shall be designated to become large-scale wilderness areas and 5% of forested areas are to be preserved as permanently unused woodland ('By 2020 forests with natural forest development account for 5% of the wooded area [corresponding to approximately 554,000 ha]). For a particular area to be classifiable as a wilderness area, natural processes without or with very slight human influence must be ensured. Like Kent, Germany was once almost completely covered with woods. However, again like Kent, there is no surviving primeval wilderness in lowland Germany. Therefore, the establishment of 'secondary' wilderness areas is central to the NBS and it is the responsibility of the regional/local administrations to designate such wilderness areas. Indeed, the target set in the NBS 'is an invitation to restore many such often degraded habitats into large functional ecological units' (Finck and Reicken, 2013).
- 9.3 Selection of such new wilderness areas in Germany is subject to a landscape analysis in which the following criteria were applied to identify potential wilderness areas:
  - (Almost) no permanent settlement or infrastructure;
  - No dissection of the of the area by roads and railroad lines;
  - Little disturbance by adjacent infrastructure or settlement;
  - Compactness of the area; and
  - Minimum continuous area of 500 ha for wetland and riparian zones and 1000 ha for woodland.Maidstone Borough Council should seek to replicate the German model on wilderness creation and enable 500 ha of re-wilded wetland and 1000 ha of re-wilded woodland where natural processes predominate.
- 9.4 A case study box describing the Knepp Estate in West Sussex may be appropriate: "Knepp is a 3,500 acre estate just south of Horsham, West Sussex. Since 2001, the land – once intensively farmed - has been devoted to a pioneering rewilding project. Using grazing animals as the drivers of habitat creation, and with the restoration of dynamic, natural water courses, the project has seen extraordinary increases in wildlife. Extremely rare species like turtle doves, nightingales, peregrine falcons and purple emperor butterflies are now breeding here; and populations of more common species are rocketing."
- 9.5 In terms of coverage of habitats by the Strategy this should reflect the best practice approach taken on the Cairngorms Connect website,



where different habitats are illustrated with key management actions listed alongside appropriate images (please see the following case study)

- 9.6 The Kent Habitat Survey classifications do not necessarily reflect the key habitats in Maidstone Borough. Therefore, the habitat list should be refined to those most significant to restoration of biodiversity and biomass and the delivery of environmental services. These would include:
- semi-natural and planted ancient woodland;
  - wet woodland and carr;
  - secondary woodland and scrub;
  - hedgerows;
  - rivers and streams;
  - lakes, ponds and reservoirs;
  - ditch, marsh, fen, bog, wet flushes and spring-lines;
  - groundwater;
  - parks and gardens;
  - brownfield sites;
  - buildings and built structures;
  - chalk grassland and scrub;
  - acid grassland and heath;
  - traditional orchards and nut platts;
  - arable and field headlands; and
  - verges, meadows and rough grassland.
- 9.7 A table setting out the relative biodiversity and biomass of each habitat would be a useful addition to the strategy. This would reflect the biodiversity and biomass of woodland and wetland as the natural climax habitat across the Borough as compared to other man-made land uses.
- 9.8 In terms of content and presentation in relation to habitat management prescriptions the approach taken on the best practice Cairngorms Connect website should be pursued. Good quality photographs of local habitat are utilised adjacent to bold statements on optimal habitat management. Examples of these clear prescriptions are reproduced in the following best practice example box.

**Best Practice Example:** Cairngorms Connect – Restoration Projects

- **Restoring watercourses and floodplains to a more natural state, by...**
  - Removing modifications to drainage, such as ditches, channels, flood-banks and obstructions, that prevent natural processes - wherever practicable.
  - Allowing the accumulation of woody material in watercourses.
  - Allowing water to flood naturally over areas of land within the project area, where this does not adversely affect other properties or livelihoods.
- **Enhancing native woodlands, by...**
  - Managing herbivore impacts (domestic livestock and native deer populations), to allow recovery of the heather & blaeberry (bilberry) field layer.
  - Eradication of non-native trees and shrubs where these risks dominating native woodlands. These may be mature non-native trees, or young trees arising from wind-blown seed in our native woods.
  - Enrichment planting of tree species that have been lost from our native woods - mainly because of high levels of grazing - that will struggle to recolonise without our help.
- **Restructuring Scots pine plantations, by...**
  - Thinning unnaturally dense plantation pine forests - by felling and pulling over trees - partly to produce timber, but also to produce a lot of standing & fallen deadwood for wildlife, and to improve the light on the forest floor - benefitting a range of wildlife from invertebrates and forest plants to capercaillie and young trees.
  - Diversifying plantations by retaining more deformed and open-crowned trees, and creating space around birch, rowan, juniper and other species that have survived in the dense forest.
  - Mimicking 'storm tracks', by pulling over large patches in the plantation, to create tangles of deadwood for wildlife.
- **Restoring bog woodlands, by...**
  - Felling non-native conifers that have been planted on drained bogs.
  - Blocking ditches to reinstate the water-table, enabling recovery of bog vegetation.
  - These bog pools are vitally important for a range of dragonfly and damselfly species.

- **Expanding native woodlands to their natural limit, by...**
  - Reducing deer numbers to allow natural regeneration from existing seed sources.
  - Using burning and grazing to create suitable seedbeds that will accelerate natural regeneration.
  - Planting tree species that have been lost from our forest edge - mainly because of high levels of grazing - and will struggle to recolonise without our help.
- **Building understanding & awareness by...**
  - Providing information about these amazing places and our aims for improving them, in an engaging way.
  - Building awareness about the benefits we all derive from our forest, hills, bogs, mountains - and the wildlife that lives in this amazing range of habitats.
  - Building the project profile locally, nationally and internationally.
  - Creating opportunities to get involved - through learning, through volunteering, and through working within the Cairngorms Connect partnership project.
- **Using good science, to...**
  - Ensure management is achieving the habitat improvements we are aiming for.
  - Detect the response of key species to management, or to other effects such as damage or disturbance.
  - Identify and quantify the benefits we all receive from better bogs, bigger woods, more natural water flow and wilder places.
  - Establish a strong foundation for our decisions about species and habitat management across the partnership area.

Link to webpage: <http://cairngormsconnect.org.uk/projects/restoration-projects>

## **10.1 Woodland**

- 10.1.1 This section should reference the importance of both protecting and expanding the largest surviving areas of ancient woodland in the Borough at Monkdown Wood / Bredhurst Hurst and Kings Wood. Reference could also be made to Cuckoo Wood at Penenden Heath, a 17 hectare privately owned and commercially coppiced semi-natural ancient woodland and Local Wildlife Site on the urban edge of Maidstone which is managed primarily for nature conservation. The complex geology underlying this site results in a notable for its ground

flora, which ranges from dry sandy almost heathland clearings with much common heather through to damp clay hollows with ransom's and and opposite-leaved golden saxifrage.

10.1.2 Some reference should also be made to:

- The extent and impact of non-native sweet chestnut planting across local ancient woodland sites (Planted Ancient Woodland Sites or PAWS) in the Borough and policy and practice interventions to achieve incremental conversion back to native woodland (Woodland Trust have done some work on this);
- Wet woodland and carr, especially on flood plains, because of its significant value to wildlife and delivery of environmental services; and
- The value of the woodland canopy for both biodiversity and biomass, as this rich habitat is 'out of sight and out of mind' and therefore under-appreciated in ecological terms. Indeed, woodland management interventions designed with the best intentions for biodiversity can in fact achieve the opposite by removing or fragmenting a sunlit and structurally complex tree canopy.

10.1.3 A case study could be incorporated relating to the Wealden Wildwood Project as promoted through the KES Tree Strategy. Maidstone Borough Council should show leadership in making this visionary initiative a reality now and lead the process. It is worth emphasising that at the time of the Domesday Book in 1086 the Weald was the most heavily wooded area of England, at around 70% tree cover (Source: Oliver Rackham). The Low Weald in Maidstone Borough is now strikingly denuded of woodland, when compared with our neighbouring authorities. Analysis of mapping indicates a paucity of Wealden tree cover in Maidstone Borough, even when contrasted to Tunbridge Wells Borough immediately to the west and Ashford to the east. GIS should therefore be used to calculate current tree cover across the Low Weald within the Borough and a strategy devised to bring the woodland back.

10.1.4 A text box addressing climbers and scramblers may be worth inserting into this section as they are particularly important for sustaining both biodiversity and biomass:

- "Dense bramble clumps in open sunny situations are of particular value. Good clumps along rides and wood margins and around buildings should be retained. Bramble growing under shade is of relatively little value for invertebrates and can be treated ruthlessly without greatly damaging invertebrate interest." Habitat Management for Invertebrates A Practical Handbook by Peter Kirby (Joint Nature Conservation Committee).
- "The deliberate removal of old and long-established ivy from trees on any conservation site is an act of vandalism. It is extremely rare for ivy to damage a tree, and the wildlife value of the ivy is likely to far outweigh any damage done. It may, however, be desirable to prevent ivy growth on a tree where there is important lichen growth, or other established interest requiring an unshaded trunk". (source: Habitat

Management for Invertebrates A Practical Handbook by Peter Kirby  
(Joint Nature Conservation Committee).

- 10.1.5 Game shooting, especially of pheasants, is a component of the local rural economy and has likely historically preserved woodland which would have otherwise been lost. However, inappropriate stocking levels, insensitive woodland management and persecution of predators can all negatively impact biodiversity. The Strategy should therefore specifically reference game shooting and potentially frame an initiative with key stakeholders to maximise biodiversity of woodland on shooting estates.
- 10.1.6 A review of gamebird release by the RSPB (Bicknell et al., 2010) highlighted the range of impacts (both positive and negative) associated with gamebird releasing. The majority of negative impacts, such as damage to vegetation and localised declines in butterflies, can be mitigated by following best practice releasing guidelines. The executive summary for Bicknell et al., (2010) reported that: “The data available show that at high densities of gamebird release, negative environmental impacts are likely to occur, and in some cases may be severe. In most cases, however, where densities are moderate, it is likely that impacts are minor or may be offset by beneficial habitat management. In areas where good habitat management is combined with low release densities, or in areas that work to promote breeding populations of gamebirds, impacts may be largely positive.” In this context, ‘high density’ is likely to be in excess of 1,000 birds per hectare in the release pen.

## **11.2 Urban Nature**

- 11.2.1 This section requires significant expansion and the incorporation of specific prescriptions to restore urban biodiversity and biomass. The urban area is the place where most people live and work and greater contact with nature is most desperately needed. There is mounting evidence that separation from nature is making people much less familiar with the natural world and wildlife. This can have negative impacts on both emotional and physical health and erode empathy with wildlife and for the natural world.
- 11.2.2 Potential prescriptions to bring nature back into the town should include:
- Delivery through policy and partnership initiatives of many new urban spaces for nature along the lines of the phenomenally popular and successful examples at the River Len Local Nature Reserve, Fant Wildlife Area, High Level Bridge and Buckland Hill, whenever and wherever the opportunity arises right across urban Maidstone and the villages;
  - Seeking through evidence, education and appropriate advice to residents and businesses a reduction in the extent of rodenticide and bird spike use in urban areas to bring back lost urban wildlife;
  - The ‘daylighting’ of watercourses historically lost to culverts and entombed under development and re-naturalising engineered

channels as and when the opportunity arises through planning policy and management and other interventions;

- Promoting the installation of integral swift, bat and other nest bricks, tubes and boxes within new and existing development (including KCC bridges and structures);
- Installing bird and bat boxes on trees, fences, poles and other appropriate locations across Maidstone Borough Council owned parks, open spaces and other appropriate sites (historically Maidstone Borough Council had worked with HM Prison Maidstone on fabrication of bird boxes and this initiative should be resurrected);
- Encourage and promote through Borough Council policy and campaigns installation of bird tables, bird and bat boxes across private gardens, housing provider land, school, hospital and residential home grounds and on commercial sites;
- Protecting and expanding urban native tree cover, this is particularly important because urban tree cover in Maidstone is currently below the national average and significantly less than that in most Kent towns (source: Forestry Commission / Woodland Trust / KES Tree Strategy);
- Implementing revised mowing regimes to deliver a mosaic of sward lengths across all Borough Council parks, gardens and other open spaces, as well as along highway verges – a mown border can be utilised to trap litter and prevent overgrowth onto footways – and undertaking outreach and advocacy to negotiate more wildlife friendly mowing regimes on private land in the Borough;
- Introducing wildlife features such as ponds, native trees and shrubs, wood piles and wildflower meadows into Borough Council parks and gardens (for example, the loss of the pond from Brenchley Garden significantly eroded biodiversity and biomass and removed day to day contact with nature for many);
- Promoting organic and wildlife friendly gardening principles and use the planning system and public information campaigns to seek to arrest the loss of gardens to car parking and other hard surfaces;
- Promoting and supporting the creation of wildlife areas and features within the grounds of commercial and institutional buildings;
- Maximising use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Solutions such as attenuation ponds and swales and ensure that they are 'wet' and hold some water at least seasonally;
- Promoting organic and wildlife friendly husbandry on Maidstone Borough Council allotments and promote such an approach on Parish Council and other allotments;
- Ensuring all lighting schemes urban and rural are sensitively planned and ideally utilise curfews, directional beams, motion sensors and red light to minimise negative impacts upon nocturnal wildlife;
- Seeking to reduce levels of road kill through appropriate traffic speed enforcement, greater use of 'hedgehog and toad crossing' signage; and
- Working with the Highway Authority to retro-fit recessed kerbs and introduce 'ladders' to prevent amphibians and other wildlife perishing in gully pots (<https://www.arguk.org/get-involved/projects-surveys/saving-amphibians-in-drains>) and utilising the planning system to ensure that all new drains are wildlife friendly.

### **12.3 Water and Wetlands Objectives**

- 12.3.1 Where it quotes “desirable infrastructure works” from the Maidstone Infrastructure Delivery Plan in this section, it is not understood why the removal of a fish pass at Yalding is referenced. Maidstone Borough Council has campaigned over many years to achieve the installation of fish passes, so it is puzzling that there is a suggestion of removing them? Removal would presumably prevent the free movement of aquatic wildlife up and downstream and block fish migration routes through the impassable weir at Yalding.
- 12.3.2 The Biodiversity Strategy should progressively seek the removal of man-made obstacles on water courses in the Borough, including weirs and culverts. The small local Rivers Len and Beult could be the focus of a specific naturalisation campaign with the Environment Agency and other partners. Where it is not possible to remove such barriers fish passes must be installed to bypass any man-made obstructions and facilitate ecological movement.
- 12.3.3 The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy previously published by MBC has sadly been proven ineffective and is now a discredited document, which should be withdrawn as a priority as a component of the ongoing Local Plan review. The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy is so flawed that it will continue to undermine any attempt to enhance biodiversity in the Borough until it is replaced. Indeed, the Maidstone Biodiversity Strategy should replace the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy outright – thus preventing duplication.
- 12.3.4 This section should also include an ambitious objective to re-naturalising all the Boroughs catchments and recreate significant tracts of floodplain woodland across the Borough. Floodplain woodlands play a vital role in delivering ecosystem services - reducing the impact of flooding, improving the quality of the overall river ecosystem and in forming vital wildlife corridors.
- 12.3.5 Poor water quality, exacerbated by low flows, is a significant problem within the Borough, including within local sites managed for nature conservation. Pollution and over-abstraction must be tackled head-on and early full compliance with the Water Framework Directive achieved. Drought and over-abstraction are bleeding our wetlands dry and Maidstone Borough Council should work with the Environment Agency to ensure that tough enforcement and realistic abstraction permitting is implemented to enable the recovery of our wetlands. The recent Chalk Streams in Crisis document (Martin Salter and Stuart Singleton-White) addresses this key driver of biodiversity decline in detail.
- 12.3.6 An annual Maidstone Borough-wide target for the creation of clean water ponds (both permanent and ephemeral) should be incorporated into the Strategy along the lines of and perhaps in partnership with the Freshwater Habitats Trust ‘Million Ponds’ project. Ponds are a characteristic feature of the Borough, especially on the Low Weald and gault clay at the foot of the Kent Downs scarp, but are being lost to agricultural change, development or simply silting-up. The demise of the very effective pond protection policy formerly contained within



the Maidstone Borough-wide Local Plan 2000 has exacerbated this decline.

- 12.3.7 Engendering groundwater recharge and reduced nitrate pollution should also be the focus of a high profile campaign, perhaps alongside the water companies, to increase tree cover and other semi-natural habitats across our local groundwater protection zones. The conservation of our little-known hypogean (groundwater) fauna, which is particularly rich in Maidstone Borough because of our complex underlying geology, should be referenced. Uncommon hypogean species have been recorded in association with springs across the Borough, including at town centre sites.
- 12.3.8 The caption under the photograph of a marsh frog on page 46 states that this species is invasive. This is perhaps unfair as the species fills a niche which is not utilised by our native common frog i.e. coastal marshes. Further, the presence of the marsh frog in Kent is likely to have prevented the endangered medicinal leech from becoming extinct in the county, as it is now its main host species since the demise of large wild mammals and changes to livestock husbandry. Indeed, the marsh frog is uncommon in Maidstone Borough with the only populations persisting on the Low Weald. Medicinal leech was still found on the Low Weald as recently as the 1970s and could potentially return one day to exploit the opportunity provided by the marsh frog and, hopefully, the return of large mammals if future rewilding initiatives succeed.
- 12.3.9 The Hammer Stream is pictured on page 46 but is located within Tunbridge Wells Borough not Maidstone. An alternative image of the River Len Local Nature Reserve on the edge of the town centre could be used:



12.3.10 The 'Key Challenges' section at page 48 includes a red banner stating that 'invasive non-native species are a major challenge for the biodiversity of rivers and wetlands in Maidstone Borough'. However, the commentary states that just 3% of water bodies in the south east are affected. The same commentary states that physical modification affects 44% of water bodies, pollution from wastewater 45%, pollution from rural sources 27% and pollution from towns 17%. There are no red banners for any of these much more significant threats. As previously mentioned, the relative impact of non-native species is scientifically contentious and they are not as significant a problem as pollution and man-made modification in Maidstone Borough. Therefore, the red banner and reference should be removed.

12.3.11 Negative impacts arising from recreational activities associated with rivers and lakes in the Borough including disturbance, damage to bankside vegetation, unauthorised and close-season angling, angling litter, over-stocking and stocking with non-native fish species should be quantified and close-season and enforcement stepped-up and codes of practice developed with stakeholders such as the Environment Agency, angling waters and clubs to reduce harm.

#### **13.4 Grassland and Agriculture**

13.4.1 On page 51 Boxley Warren Local Nature Reserve should be referenced as it supports an extensive mosaic of species-rich chalk grassland, scrub and woodland, studded with dew ponds. Rare plants at the Warren include ground-pine, stinking hellebore and native box alongside a fauna including tawny cockroach, adder and common buzzard.

13.4.2 Also on page 51 Marden Meadow and its neutral unimproved grassland on the Low Weald should be referenced, as it is famed for its hay rattle, green-winged orchids and water violet.

13.4.3 The Strategy should emphasise at this section the biodiversity limitations of hay meadows, and by extension ornamental 'wildflower meadows', as they support a very limited invertebrate fauna because of the intensive maintenance interventions required i.e. "Management of grassland for hay production is far from ideal for invertebrates. The vegetation is allowed to grow uniformly tall, so that it is unsuitable for invertebrates associated with short vegetation and bare ground. Just as the vegetation has grown sufficiently tall and is flowering and seeding to an extent sufficient to support a good above-ground community of invertebrates, the whole lot is cut down." (source: Habitat Management for Invertebrates A Practical Handbook by Peter Kirby (Joint Nature Conservation Committee)).

13.4.4 The grassland section should specifically reference local declines in rabbit populations as a result of myxomatosis and rabbit haemorrhagic disease, a 'key-stone', which is leading to the loss of grassland habitats, well-structured woodland edge, clearings and areas of bare soil so valuable to many wildlife species.

13.4.5 The negative impacts upon biodiversity from inappropriate use of endectocides should be referenced at this section. Many livestock and

horse wormers (anthelmintics) contain avermectins, a series of drugs which can seriously impact insect populations, particularly dung beetles and flies which are a main food source for bats and many farmland birds. Not only are dung beetles and flies a vital component of a healthy ecosystem, they also offer significant wider benefits by recycling nutrients, reducing farmland ammonia emissions and suppressing livestock parasite loads. By avoiding wormer use during the spring and summer (when bats and birds are foraging the most) and keeping stock and horses housed after treatment, this will significantly reduce the impact on insect populations and the many other species which depend upon them.

#### **14. Projects & Summary**

- 14:1 In terms of projects, engagement by Maidstone Borough Council with the B-Lines South East (Buglife UK), Hedgehog Street (People's Trust for Endangered Species and British Hedgehog Preservation Society) Million Ponds (Freshwater Habitats Trust) initiatives would assist delivery of the aims of this Strategy. In relation to making the Wealden Wildwood vision a reality the Woodland Trust could be a key delivery partner, alongside local landowners, as they have already identified the loss of woodland cover across the Low Weald as requiring action.

#### **15. Other**

- 15.1 A detailed schedule setting out the governance structure and staff resources required to implement the Strategy. Targets, milestones, annual monitoring and reporting will all also need to be framed and agreed. Historically, similar strategies have failed at the implementation stage with efforts to ensure that planning management addresses biodiversity having failed to-date. Service business plans and individual staff target-setting will all need to reflect the significance of the unfolding biodiversity and biomass emergency. Sign-off by Full Council of the Strategy because of its link to the Strategic Plan is therefore appropriate.
- 15.2 As general observations, layout and presentation requires some further attention to ensure the most professional document possible, to help facilitate effective persuasion and engagement, and all photographs must be of the highest quality and emphasise biodiversity and biomass rather than single species. Professional publication may therefore be appropriate. The document must aspire to be the best and most progressive in the UK.
- 15.2 Maidstone Borough must demonstrate national leadership in the clarity and effectiveness of its response to the biodiversity and biomass emergency. **This Strategy must not be allowed to fail.**

## Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

**12 November 2019**

### Request for Village Green application

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	Director of Finance and Business Improvement
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Corporate Property Manager
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	Boxley

#### Executive Summary

On 18 June 2019 a petition was presented to this Committee requesting that the Council apply to Kent County Council (the Commons Registration Authority) for Weaving Heath to be registered as a Village Green. Following debate the Committee resolved that a full report on the options available be prepared for the appropriate Committee.

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

1. That Members refer the petitioners' request to Policy & Resources Committee.

#### Timetable

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Communities Housing and Environment Committee	12 November 2019
Policy and Resources Committee	4 December 2019

## Request for Village Green application

### 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	The Safe, Clean and Green corporate priority is relevant but there is no incremental impact as Weaving Heath is held as public open space.	Corporate Property Manager
<b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>	As for corporate priorities.	Corporate Property Manager
<b>Risk Management</b>	Covered in the risk section of the report.	Corporate Property Manager
<b>Financial</b>	No implications at this stage.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Staffing</b>	No implications at this stage.	Corporate Property Manager
<b>Legal</b>	The council has a discretion as owner of the land to apply to register the land as a village green under s15 (8) of the Commons Act 2006. It is a discretion not a duty and the decision will be made by Policy and Resources Committee having considered relevant factors.	Legal Team
<b>Privacy and Data Protection</b>	No implications.	Corporate Property Manager
<b>Equalities</b>	No implications.	Corporate Property Manager
<b>Public Health</b>	No implications.	Corporate Property Manager
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	No implications.	Corporate Property Manager
<b>Procurement</b>	No implications.	Corporate Property Manager

## **2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 As part of the development of Grove Green a section 52 Planning Agreement, (previous version of current s106), was signed on 30 March 1982. As part of that agreement the owners of the land, now known as Weaving Heath, transferred ownership of it to Maidstone Borough Council.
  - 2.2 The land was transferred subject to necessary easements and rights and subject to a covenant in favour of the owners that the land be used by the Council for no purpose whatsoever other than as a public space.
  - 2.3 This has continued from 1982 to date and is required by the transfer covenant to continue until 30 March 2062.
  - 2.4 On 18 June 2019 a petition was presented to this Committee requesting that the Council approach KCC to register Weaving Heath as a Village Green. Following some debate the Committee resolved that a full report on the options available be prepared for the appropriate Committee.
  - 2.5 Under the Council's Constitution, the Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for making decisions regarding land and property. This report therefore recommends that the matter is referred to Policy & Resources Committee.
- 

## **3 AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 Option 1 – Take no further action.
  - 3.2 Option 2 – Refer the matter to the appropriate Committee
- 

## **4 PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 Option 2 – Refer the matter to the appropriate Committee. This conforms with the Council's constitution and allows the petition to be dealt with.
- 

## **5 RISK**

- 5.1 It is recommended that risk is considered by Policy & Resources Committee.
-

## **6 CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

6.1 This matter arose following a local petition.

---

## **7 NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

7.1 This report recommends that the matter is referred to Policy & Resources Committee.

---

## **8 REPORT APPENDICES**

None.

---

## **9 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.