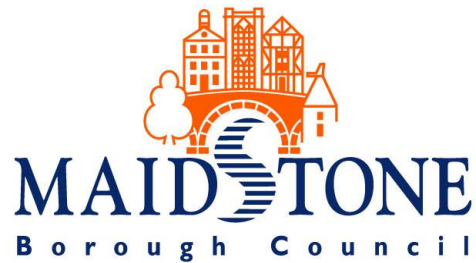


Maidstone's Biodiversity Strategy

A Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Phase 1: 2009 – 2014

HAP 11: Rivers



Rivers Action Plan

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Description

- 1.1 This habitat type includes a very wide range of types, encompassing all natural and near-natural running waters in the UK (i.e. with features and processes that resemble those in 'natural' systems). These range from torrential mountain streams to meandering lowland rivers.
- 1.2 Rivers are newly designated priority habitats and the draft criteria for Priority Rivers are as follows:
- Headwaters
 - Occurrence of the EU Habitat Directive Annex I habitat (H3260 Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculion fluitantis* and *Callitricho-Batrachion* vegetation). The definition will include (but not be confined to) all river SACs designated for the feature. Chalk Rivers as given in the existing UK BAP definition
 - Active shingle rivers
 - Areas or Sites of Special Scientific Interest (A/SSSI) :
 - A/SSSI designated for river species, riverine features or fluvial geomorphology
 - Rivers designated for other features (e.g. surrounding wetlands), with the exception of severely degraded reaches (see below)
 - Sites identified for fluvial geomorphology through the Geological Conservation Review (GCR)
 - Species – detailed quantitative guidance is under development in 2008 and will cover:
 - Occurrence of Annex II Habitats Directive species
 - BAP priority species
 - Riverine water bodies of high hydromorphological/ecological status. The Environment Agency and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency are working on criteria and rules to identify such water bodies, which will be added to the UK BAP criteria when they are available.
- 1.3 The Countryside Survey²⁷ in 2007 indicates that there are approximately 64,000 ha of river and stream habitat within the UK.
- 1.4 Rivers are essential habitat for a range of protected species such as otter, depressed river mussel, Atlantic salmon, brown trout, water vole and European eel.
- 1.5 When implementing the river action plan the wet woodland habitat action plan should be considered.

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National status

- 2.1 The 2007 Countryside Survey²⁷ indicates that plant species richness of streambanks decreased by 7.5% in Great Britain between 1998 and 2007.
- 2.2 The streambank vegetation community has continued to shift toward a late-successional assemblage, with an associated loss of species and increase in nutrient-demanding, competitive herbaceous plants and woody species. These changes suggest that the riparian areas of headwater streams are generally becoming less physically disturbed by adjacent agricultural practices. They are likely to be a consequence of catchment-sensitive management practices which aim to reduce the impacts of diffuse pollution, e.g. grants for watercourse fencing.
- 2.3 Due to the added protection afforded to headwaters plant species richness in streams has increased in Great Britain between 1998 and 2007 (Countryside Survey 2007²⁷).

Local status

- 3.1 There are a total of eight rivers that occur within Maidstone Borough: River Medway, River Teise, River Beult, River Sherway, River Len, River Loose, River Lesser Teise and a small section of the Great Stour
- 3.2 The River Beult is designated a SSSI, however the most recent assessment of the river in 2003 indicated that the river was in an unfavourable condition with no change from the previous assessment.
- 3.3 Data from the Environment Agency indicate that all rivers within Maidstone are Priority Rivers as all contain UK BAP species and some contain species under the Annex II Habitats Directive Species.
- 3.4 All of the Rivers in Maidstone Borough have now been assessed against Water Framework Directive criteria with the River Medway classified "moderate", the River Beult "poor", River Len "bad", River Loose "poor", River Sherway "moderate", River Teise "moderate", Lesser Teise "moderate" and Great Stour "moderate". No rivers in Maidstone Borough achieve a "good" classification.

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Factors causing decline in biodiversity

- 4.1 Excessive abstraction mainly for public water supply cause low flow of river causing upper sections and riparian zones to dry out in addition to reduced flow velocities, accumulation of silt which changes in the aquatic vegetation structure.
- 4.2 Physical modification: usually for flood defence, drainage, navigation, historic water-mills, and ornamental or fishery purposes. These changes often lead to a marked reduction in river habitat diversity, and reduced ecological connectivity along the river's course.
- 4.3 Pollution: Effluent from fish farms, water-cress beds and light industry can cause deoxygenating of the water and lead to a reduction in biodiversity. Agricultural practices can lead to diffuse pollution and increased silt inputs.

Current national action

- 5.1 The European Water Framework Directive (WFD) came into force in December 2000 and became part of UK law in December 2003. The EA are the competent authority for carrying out the Directive and gives an opportunity to plan and deliver a better water environment, focusing on ecology. The Directive will help to protect and enhance the quality of:
 - surface freshwater (including lakes, streams and rivers)
 - groundwaters
 - groundwater dependant ecosystems
 - estuaries
 - coastal waters out to one mile from low-water.
- 5.2 The Thames River Basin which includes the River Medway and its tributes was the second river basin in England to be consulted on under the Water Framework Directive with the Management Plan due to be published in 2009.
- 5.3 In carrying out their functions the Environment Agency, Water Companies, Internal Drainage Bodies, in England have a statutory duty to further conservation where consistent with purposes of enactment relating to their water management functions. On-going work includes addressing the causes and impacts of low flows and ensuring that flood defence activity and development are sympathetic to the needs of river habitats.

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National plan objectives and actions

6.1 As this is a relatively new priority habitat there is currently no national plan or targets.

Local plan objectives and actions

7.1 As this is a relatively new priority habitat there is currently no country plan or targets.

Maidstone's objectives

8.1 Maidstone's objectives are;

1. **Conserve the characteristic flora, fauna and physical habitat features of rivers including their winterbourne stretches.**
2. **Raise awareness of the importance of rivers as a UK BAP priority habitat in Maidstone.**
3. **Work with the Environment Agency and other partners to improve the Water Framework Directive classifications of Maidstone Borough's rivers.**
4. **Actively work to removal of culverts, canalisation, weirs and other modification from Maidstone Borough's rivers.**
5. **Produce in partnership with EA a policy tool kit for each river for landowners and developers (see River Len pilot tool kit).**

Rivers Action Plan

Objectives and targets

Objective 1, 3, 5: Conserve the characteristic flora, fauna and physical habitat features of rivers including their winterbourne stretches

Target 1: Quantifiable improvement in habitat quality of rivers in Maidstone (as judged by EA quality indicators)

R	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
1.	Ensure that Maidstone's Local Development Framework contain policy requiring Sustainable Urban Drainage to be implemented within any new developments and that they are sensitive to ecological requirements.	2009	2010	ALL	
2.	Promote advice on best-practice river corridor management in partnership with local river owners and users. Through users groups such as MRUA, working alongside statutory and regulatory bodies	2009	2014	EA Natural England	
3.	Ensure that Flood Defence operations and improvements are sensitive to ecological requirements.	2009	2014	ALL	
4.	Implement measures to ensure that risks posed by invasive, non-native species are reduced and opportunities for containment or eradication are implemented (see action UGS 9).	2009	2014	ALL	
5.	Monitor biodiversity and ongoing management plan to the River Len Nature Reserve river biodiversity (see action WW 7)	2009	2014	ALL	
6.	Review biodiversity data available on rivers in Maidstone and how changes in biodiversity can be assessed with these data.	2009	2014	EA	
7.	All future Greenfield development should aim not to build on river floodplains and enhance the ecology of these areas	2009	2014	EA	
8.	Produce policy toolkit for each river in the borough	2010	2015	EA	

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Objective 2: Raise awareness of the importance of rivers as a UK BAP priority habitat in Maidstone

Target 2 & 4: Increased awareness of the importance of rivers in Maidstone and the actions being progressed under this HAP.

R	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
9.	Organise 10 event days on the Rivers in Maidstone	2009	2011	MVCP	5 canoe safaris and 5 walking day events organised for 2009, 2010 and 2011 on the River Medway.
10.	Support the development of the River Medway Website development	2009	2014	ALL	Work in progress by EA to develop a website with info on events, history etc., of the River Medway. Similar to the Visit Thames web site.
11.	Promote the MVCP River Walks Pack	2009	2014	ALL	Developed in partnership with MVCP
12.	Promote Maidstone Walk Pack – as many of the walks pass alongside one of Maidstone's Rivers.	2009	2014	ALL	
13.	Review and report on Maidstone Walk Packs: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Need for any additional Maidstone river information/walk packs with a Biodiversity focus 2. Success of Maidstone walk packs 	2009	2014		MVCP has produced a river walk pack. MBC has produced a River Len Walk Pack. Action Point on Green Space Strategy.
14.	Promote removal of culverts, canalisation, weirs and other modification from Maidstone Borough's rivers	2010	2015	Planning and developers	