

Draft Biodiversity Strategy

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

Meeting	Date
Communities Housing and Environment Committee	Tuesday 12 November 2019

Draft Biodiversity Strategy

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	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
Cross Cutting Objectives	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
Risk Management	This is covered in Section 5.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Financial	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
Staffing	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.	
Legal	<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
Privacy and Data Protection	The recommendations within this report will have no impact on privacy or data protection.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	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]
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Crime and Disorder	The recommendation will not have a negative impact on Crime and Disorder	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Procurement	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.
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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.
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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.
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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.
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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.
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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
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None