

Update on Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan

Final Decision-Maker	Policy and Resources Committee
Lead Head of Service	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Lead Officer and Report Author	Helen Miller, Overview & Scrutiny Officer Biodiversity & Climate Change
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

The Council approved a motion relating to biodiversity and climate change in April 2019. A Working Group was formed and tasked with writing an action plan to address climate change and biodiversity and present it to Policy and Resource Committee in April 2020.

The working group has created an initial draft. However, due to COVID-19 work, it will take two months longer to bring the action plan to the Committee.

Purpose of Report

Noting

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the Policy and Resource Committee note the delay and agree to receive the action plan for consideration in June 2020.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Policy and Resource Committee	29 April 2020

Update on Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The necessary delay of two months will not be wasted as it will improve the Council's ability to understand how to reduce its carbon emissions and enhance biodiversity within the borough. The action plan will be aligned to the core priorities in the Strategic Plan.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Cross Cutting Objectives	The report recommendation supports the aim that biodiversity and environmental sustainability is respected by ensuring the working group has time to use expert advice, information from public consultation and guidance from heads of service to inform the action plan created.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Risk Management	Please refer to section 4 of the report.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Financial	The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Legal	Local Authorities have a duty under Section 40 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 in exercising their functions to have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. The Council's intention to create a Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan demonstrates compliance with the statutory duty. In addition, the Covid 19 measures put in place by Central Government are assisting the Council in meeting its climate change objectives in that carbon emissions are substantially reduced by the lock down	Benedict King Legal Team

Privacy and Data Protection	No impacts on Privacy and Data Protection identified as a result of the report and recommendation.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	No equalities impact identified as a result of the report and recommendation.	Policy & Information Manager
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	There are no Crime and Disorder issues to note.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Procurement	There are no Procurement issues to note	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance & Section 151 Officer

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In April 2019 the Council approved a motion recognising global climate and biodiversity emergencies and requesting the Policy and Resource Committee to;
- undertake a short review of Maidstone Borough Council’s governance policies and progress aimed at addressing locally these twin threats and to report on findings;
 - consider a target date of 2030 for the whole of the Borough of Maidstone to be carbon neutral;
 - consider how the Council can strengthen local protection and enhancement of species, habitats and ecosystems services under available powers.
- 2.2 A Working Group was created to research the matters and create an action plan to present to the Policy and Resource Committee in April 2020. It met monthly to interview expert witnesses and provide guidance on the draft action plan. However, the meeting scheduled for the end of March was postponed due to guidance relating to meetings. In addition, key members and officers have been working on COVID-19 related activities. However, several ongoing and recent activities that will maximise the value of the delay and improve the draft action plan further as set out below.
- 2.3 The working group recognised the importance of the Council measuring its current emissions, often called carbon footprint, and having an action plan for reducing carbon emissions from its estate, fleet and activities to as close to net zero as possible by 2030. The Carbon Trust was commissioned to carry out this work and the carbon footprint for the council for the 2018-19 financial year was 3,016.7 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent (tCO₂e). The largest emissions source was associated with the council’s procured goods and services, which accounted for 1665.7 tCO₂e (53%). The full report,

providing a pathway to net zero by 2030, is anticipated at the end of May 2020. However, it is normal practice for the Carbon Trust to inspect key buildings and it is possible information may be gathered in new ways to support social distancing and safe working practices.

- 2.4 The working group wished to use the information from consultations and events with residents, young people and land managers to inform the action plan. The consultation with residents has been conducted online with over 1200 responses received. These will be collated in the second week in April which will be used to inform the action plan. The event with young people was postponed by Mid Kent College in response to guidance regarding COVID-19 and it is not currently possible to determine when this will be held. On 13th March an event focused on biodiversity was run with land managers, farmers, developers, parish councils and information giving organisations. Over 40 people participated and 26 made pledges on what they would do including providing areas for wildlife, working in partnership and with the public, discussing biodiversity with planners, and links were made between habitat creation and flood management. An action will be added to the action plan regarding working with land managers and farmers after further liaison for clarification.
- 2.5 A draft action plan was discussed at the Wider Leadership Awayday on 9th March. Further meetings were scheduled with senior officers to ensure the actions were relevant and feasible but have not all taken place due to reprioritising of work to respond to COVID-19. Feedback will be obtained to allow the action plan to be presented to the Committee in June 2020.
- 2.6 The draft action plan currently focuses on achievable actions, supported by evidence, to address the Council motion and to embed biodiversity and climate change actions into everything the Council does. However, further work is also being done on producing a strategy to sit alongside the action plan. The strategy will both support the action plan and set out ambitious goals, beyond the actions identified, for the Council to aim for and drive work over the coming years.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Policy and Resource Committee is requested to note the delay and agree to receive the action plan for consideration in June 2020. The delay is due to changes caused by adaptation to COVID-19

4. RISK

- 4.1 There is a risk to the Council's reputation if it does not act on the motion declared recognising global climate and biodiversity emergencies. This report shows the Council is acting upon the motion whilst responding to COVID-19. The subsequent report due in June 2020 will allay the risk.

4.2 There is a risk that the Carbon Trust may fail to deliver the report providing the carbon reduction plan. This is being managed by fortnightly meetings with the Carbon Trust. All agreed timescales have been met thus far and plans will be made to ensure the service can be completed on time.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

5.1 An online resident consultation was run from 7th February to 20th March. Over 1200 responses were received and analysis of the consultation will be provided in the June report.

6. REPORT APPENDICES

None.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.