

Parks and Open Spaces Delivery Plan for Biodiversity

Final Decision-Maker	Communities, Housing and Environment Committee
Lead Head of Service	Jennifer Stevens, Head of Environment and Public Realm
Lead Officer and Report Author	Andrew Williams, Parks and Open Spaces Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

Following the adoption of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy, this delivery plan sets out the actions for enhancing biodiversity with the Council's Parks and Open Spaces over the next 5 years. The plan sets out the aims and benefits of increasing and diversifying habitats whilst also recognising the constraints faced and how these may be overcome.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the Committee adopt the Parks and Open Spaces Delivery Plan for Biodiversity 2021-26, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Communities, Housing and Environment Committee	30 November 2021

Parks and Open Spaces Delivery Plan for Biodiversity

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>The actions set out in this delivery plan are designed to enhance and promote biodiversity and therefore supports the Council’s objective of a safe, clean, and green borough.</p>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The report recommendation(s) supports the achievement(s) of the biodiversity cross cutting objectives by identifying specific actions the Council will carry out in its parks and open spaces to enhance and promote biodiversity.</p>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Risk Management	The risks associated with this decision are outlined in Section 5	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Financial	Whilst the delivery plan sets out a number of actions that can be delivered within the existing Parks and Open Spaces budget, to achieve the Council’s ambitions additional funding will be required. Therefore, this plan sets out a range of initiatives which will be delivered as and when resources are available including external funding.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	As with the financial implications, there are many actions which can be delivered with the	Head of Environment

	existing resource, however additional support, potentially through partner agencies will be required to achieve the ambitious targets set out in the Council's Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy.	and Public Realm
Legal	There are no legal implications of this delivery plan.	Team Leader, Contentious and Corporate Governance
Privacy and Data Protection	No implications identified.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment	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	The recommended actions within the delivery plan will not have any impact on crime and disorder.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Procurement	There are no specific procurement requirements identified by this report, however procurement rules will be followed when required.	Head of Service & Section 151 Officer
Biodiversity and Climate Change	The implications of this report have been considered and align with the Corporate Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In April 2019, Maidstone Borough Council declared a biodiversity and climate change emergency recognising the impact climate change is having on our environment. As a result of this it adopted a Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy in 2020 which set out an ambitious programme of actions and targets, not limited to those within our control, to halt and reverse this impact.
- 2.2 Biodiversity originally became part of the global agenda back in 1992 when 150 countries signed the Convention on Biological Diversity at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. This filtered down to the local level in the form of

Local Biodiversity Action Plans, or LBAPs, which were designed to enhance priority habitats, were exceptionally detailed but largely incomprehensible and certainly not deliverable.

- 2.3 LBAPs are no longer considered part of the national approach to managing biodiversity, with conservation management largely being subsumed into local plans or other statutory documents.
- 2.4 Whilst the Council's Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy considers the whole Borough and the actions needed across all sectors including transportation, energy, waste, and housing, it also recognises the specific need for a Parks and Open Spaces biodiversity action plan which is regularly reviewed with best practice to ensure every opportunity is taken to enhance biodiversity in our own estate.
- 2.5 This Parks and Open Spaces Delivery Plan for Biodiversity has been prepared to support the ambitions of the wider Strategy and action plan and provide specific actions which will be delivered over the next 5 years and when resources allow. It also looks to set out the ethos by which all future management of our Parks and Open Spaces will adhere to, ensuring that biodiversity remains a focus whilst continuing to deliver green spaces that satisfy the needs of our residents and visitors.
- 2.6 The five-year action plan included in this document contains a mix of objectives which combine wide ranging 'blanket' objectives such as increasing community involvement, to targeted interventions focused on specific habitats or species such as wetlands.
- 2.7 The Plan acknowledges that not all the actions can be delivered within the service's current budget or resources. However, recognises sources of funding which will be sought to support delivery including developers' contributions.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Committee could decide to adopt the Parks and Open Spaces Delivery Plan for Biodiversity, enabling the five-year action plan to be implemented and for funding to be sought to support the range of projects. This supports action 6.2 of the Council's Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy which was adopted in 2020.
- 3.2 Alternatively, the Committee could decide to make amendments to the delivery plan and attached action plan.
- 3.3 The Committee could decide not to adopt a delivery plan for biodiversity in its parks and open spaces.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Parks and Open Spaces Delivery Plan for Biodiversity is adopted, setting out the council's commitment to enhancing biodiversity in its own estate. This will ensure that the Parks Team have a clear focus on delivering diverse habitats that support wildlife whilst continuing to meet the wide range of needs of park users and residents.
 - 4.2 Without this delivery plan there is a risk of a disjointed approach to enhancing biodiversity in our parks and the potential of conflicting priorities failing to maximise ecological benefits.
 - 4.3 Development of this plan has considered a wide range of information available and discussions with stakeholders and industry experts. It is important to recognise that the actions set out in the plan seek to enhance biodiversity through a range of habitats, not just increasing tree cover which has historically been the focus. Whilst important, this plan looks to ensure this is not carried out to the detriment of the wide variety of habitats identified across Maidstone's Parks and Open Spaces.
 - 4.4 However, if the Committee identifies specific actions that are missing from the plan, the plan can be amended prior to it being agreed.
 - 4.5 The Plan remains a live document and additional actions where identified and appropriate will be incorporated into the plan.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 Failing to take positive actions to address and, where possible, reverse habitat loss and biodiversity decline, will contribute to the biodiversity and climate emergency, which in time will affect us all. There is a significant risk that if we do not collectively act now, we will not be able to stop the decline and will permanently lose habitats and species.
 - 5.2 There is also a reputational risk to the Council if it fails to take action to enhance biodiversity in its own estate whilst seeking other parties to act. This is likely to affect the deliverability of the wider Strategy and strategic objectives.
 - 5.3 The risk of adopting this plan is that the Council does not have the resources or funding to deliver it. However, this is acknowledged in the plan and funding opportunities identified. The plan includes actions that can be delivered within existing resources whilst also setting out more ambitious objectives when funding allows.
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6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 There has been significant Member consultation on biodiversity over the past few years including previous reports to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee, a members' briefing session and consultation with

the Climate Change Working Group. Feedback from all these sessions have supported the development of this delivery plan.

- 6.2 A key outcome of the feedback was to focus this plan on what the Council can deliver within its own estate rather than the wider remit which has been captured in the Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 If the Committee decides to adopt the Parks and Open Spaces Delivery Plan for Biodiversity, the team will ensure that it is publicised as well as promoted across the Council and park stakeholders.
- 7.2 Activities carried out as part of the plan will be promoted using social media and opportunities will be sought to increase awareness and engagement with residents and park users.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

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

Appendix 1: Parks and Open Spaces Delivery Plan for Biodiversity 2021-26

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy 2020