

Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan Update

Final Decision-Maker	Executive
Lead Head of Service	Angela Woodhouse, Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Lead Officer and Report Author	Anna Collier, Corporate Insight, Communities & Governance Manager and James Wilderspin, Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

The Policy and Resources Committee adopted the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan on 21st October 2020. This report is the fourth update of the status and implementation of the Action Plan, and includes an overview of each action's status, and details of indicators used to monitor progress (**Appendix 1**).

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to note progress made on delivery of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the Committee notes the progress made towards delivery of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Wider Leadership Team	20 September 2022
Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee	15 November 2022
Executive	23 November 2022

Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan Update

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve (i) Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure (ii) Safe, Clean and Green (iii) Homes and Communities (iv) A Thriving Place.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Cross Cutting Objectives	The report recommendations support the achievement of the biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability and supports respected cross cutting issues including respecting nature and heritage, reducing inequalities through engagement and public wellbeing through access to open and green spaces, and ensuring Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Risk Management	5.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. Responding the climate emergency is a key corporate risk. Ongoing monitoring of the delivery of the Strategy and Action plan is a key mitigation as the annual review of the action plan is ensures continued accountability.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Financial	£2.9 million funding has been allocated to the implementation of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan. Additional bids for external funding to help achieve the aims of the strategy will also be sought at every opportunity.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Legal	There are no legal implications associated with the recommendations set out in the report which is to note the update on the action plan and not for decision. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 by virtue of	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

	Section 40 places a duty on local authorities to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising their functions. The duty is an integral part of policy and decision making in relation to all the council functions, services, and actions of the Council.	
Privacy and Data Protection	There are no impacts on Privacy and Data Protection identified as a result of the report and recommendation.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Equalities	A high-level Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the Action Plan and further assessments and inclusive measures will be made for relevant projects and will be intrinsic to the Biodiversity and Climate Engagement Strategy.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Public Health	We recognise that implementing the biodiversity and climate change action plan will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager
Crime and Disorder	There are no Crime and Disorder issues to Note.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Procurement	Contracts and services are the highest contributing factor to the council estimated at between 60% to 90% of the councils' total emissions (scope 3) – from areas such as capital construction projects and investments. MBC can put in place software and policy to ensure that carbon prices are calculated as part of any purchase the council makes. This would ensure that for any goods or services MBC staff are planning to purchase will have a cost to the council in terms of carbon.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager
Biodiversity and Climate Change	This report strengthens the council's position, through a review/update, budget allocation, and commencement of projects set out in the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan to achieve Net Zero in keeping with the Councils commitment by 2030 and increase and sustain biodiversity across the Borough.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Policy and Resources Committee adopted the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan on 21st October 2020. This is the fourth report that provides a sixth monthly progress update of the implementation of the Action Plan (**Appendix 1**). The previous update was to Policy and Resources Committee on the 9th of February 2022.
- 2.2 In the last report additional adequate capital funding was allocated as part of the Budget Report to allow the Council to continue to implement the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan beyond 2022. Local authorities are in a key position to influence behaviour change, lead by example, and support communities and businesses to reach the UK's Net Zero and biodiversity commitments. Adequate funding and urgency are needed not only to make savings to the Council in the long term through transitioning away from fossil fuels and investment in renewables, but also to ensure the Council's actions are proportionate to the biodiversity and climate emergency the council declared in April 2019. For this reason the original £1 million biodiversity and climate change budget was increased to £2.9 million as part of the Five Year Capital Programme (see Appendix E3 [MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL CAPITAL STRATEGY 2022/23](#)).

FIVE YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2022/23 - 2026/27	Five Year Plan						Total 22/23 to 26/27 £000
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	
Corporate Property Acquisitions	11,809	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	12,500
Kent Medical Campus - Innovation Centre	3,000	250					250
Lockmeadow Ongoing Investment	932	500	1,300				1,800
Garden Community	1,613	200	200	200	200	200	1,000
Infrastructure Delivery		1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	5,000
Asset Management / Corporate Property	1,653	175	175	175	175	175	875
Other Property Works		980					980
Biodiversity & Climate Change	100	1,400		500	500	500	2,900
Feasibility Studies	162	50	50	50	50	50	250
Digital Projects	25	25	25	25	25	25	125
Software / PC Replacement	342	200	200	200	200		800
Maidstone House Works		1,000					1,000
Automation Projects		200					200
New Ways of Working - Make the Office Fit for Purpose		40					40
Archbishop's Palace		400	400				800
Fleet Vehicle Replacement Programme	748	149	456	457	270	96	1,428
Sub-total Policy & Resources	20,384	9,069	6,306	5,107	4,920	4,546	29,948
Bridges Gyrotary Scheme	86	120					120
Sub-total Strategic Planning & Infrastructure	86	120					120
TOTAL	33,179	27,530	31,099	51,404	53,572	69,738	233,343

- 2.3 The MBC Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan scored a 72% or joint 25th place in the UK out of 325 councils who have declared a climate emergency according to [Climate Emergency UK's campaign](#). Recognition of MBC's commitment and the robustness of the Action Plan is valuable, as it raises MBC's profile on these important topics and shows Maidstone Council to be a strategic leader.

- 2.4 It is however vital to continually review and update the Action Plan ensuring actions are tangible and deliverable across multiple service areas of the council also ensuring ongoing accountability.
- 2.5 Officers have been working to embed biodiversity and climate into decision making across the council and create measurable indicators of progress against the action plan (**Appendix 2**). The process has been challenging as not all actions are clearly defined and do not have measurable outcomes. Some actions require expertise from a number of departments or specialist sustainability knowledge to ensure the action plan is achievable across the entire council's operations.
- 2.6 MBC appointed a Biodiversity and Climate Engagement Officer in July. The newly appointed Officer has received training from the [Carbon Literacy Project](#) to enable them to deliver accreditation training to staff and members. The Officer is currently developing a training manual tailored to different department needs across the council to be rolled out commencing November 2022. Additionally, a staff training module on Climate Change and Biodiversity has been made mandatory on the ELMS system for all staff and new joiners at the Council. With wide scale training and awareness building on carbon literacy, the integration of Biodiversity and Climate Change into decision making across the council will be more achievable.
- 2.7 The Council Leader has made a commitment that the council will prioritise biodiversity and climate change in everything it does and that this commitment will be led by the Executive, to ensure that it is central to all decisions made. As part of the annual review process the following actions will be undertaken to strengthen the accountability and transparency of the action plan:
- Officers and Executive will undertake the annual review of the action plan to create greater clarity and ensure actions are specific and transparent and have estimated costs and timescales
 - Identify actions that are (i) in direct control of the council and (ii) actions under the influence of the council.
 - Align direct and influence actions to Portfolio holders and PACs to ensure accountability at an Executive and Member level.
 - Consult PACs on the revised plan, alignment of the actions, along with potential costs and timeframes.
 - Prioritise actions in direct control of the council.
- 2.8 Work on these changes will start towards the end of the calendar year and as part of the process the relevant PACs and officers will be consulted to ensure that plan is robust, deliverable and remains central to the Council's priorities.

Current Status of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan

- 2.9 In summary, of a total of 68 Actions across the Biodiversity and Climate Change action plan, 29 actions are Red (delayed or incomplete), 33 are

Amber (ongoing or being investigated), and 6 action are Green and have been completed. For full details of each action's status, including the February 2022 update, responsible officers, outputs, and outcomes please see **Appendix 1** with this report.

RAG Rating	Number of Actions
Red (Incomplete or delayed)	29
Amber (ongoing or being investigated)	33
Green (Complete)	6

- 2.10 To demonstrate strategic impact an Indicator framework has been developed for the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan that incorporates specific measures of progress for each action and aligns with Strategic Planning existing indicators. Where possible indicators were also aligned with national Government and Kent County Council indicators. The indicators will support operational improvement, provide an analytical basis for decision making and prioritisation, ensuring the council is monitoring its progress toward its climate and biodiversity commitments. The Key Performance Indicators can be found in **Appendix 2**.
- 2.11 Highlights from the Implementation of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan can be seen below, and a full update is provided at **Appendix 1**.

The Go Green Information Centre (Actions 8.1 / 8.4 / 8.5)

- 2.12 The Go Green Information Centre pilot project ran from the 8th of September to the 2nd of October and has now concluded. A pop-up, walk-in community information centre was established in The Mall shopping centre in Maidstone town centre, for 4 weeks and staffed by volunteers. The aims of the centre were to enable residents, vulnerable groups, and businesses to make more informed sustainable decisions, learn about funding opportunities and grant support, learn about products and practices that can reduce waste, reduce energy consumption, carbon emissions and to ultimately build resilience to the impacts of climate change. Local sustainable businesses were invited to showcase and demonstrate their goods and services for free to reach local people and create clarity and confidence in making greener choices. The centre also hosted numerous interactive events, talks and demonstrations.
- 2.13 A total of 870 Maidstone Residents came into the Go Green Information Centre over the full period the centre was open (17 days), an average of 51 users per day. Feedback from the public was largely positive and child centred events such as 'soap making' and 'seed bomb making' were very popular and overbooked. Users were mainly interested in grant opportunities, reducing their energy bills, and issues around waste collection and recycling. A stand-alone summary report of the Go Green Information Centre pilot project is being developed by officers to highlight the successes and failures of the pilot, with the aim to learn from and develop the project to roll out again in 2023 for a longer period to continue to support and engage with residents and businesses.

Decarbonisation Study (Action 7.1)

2.14 A comprehensive Decarbonisation Study of the Council's key assets has been underway since February and is nearing completion. The study led by APSE Energy and the Salvis Group has conducted in depth site surveys of:

1. Maidstone House
2. The Link
3. Town Hall
4. The Archbishops Palace and Gate House
5. Maidstone Museum
6. Lockmeadow Shopping Centre and Market Hall
7. The Depot
8. The Crematorium and Offices
9. Cob Tree Golf Clubhouse
10. Maidstone Leisure Centre (*note: this survey is incomplete as of October 2022*)

2.15 The study takes a whole building approach and will give recommendations to decarbonise the buildings in line with the council 2030 Net Zero commitment. The recommendations include upgrades and retrofits to heating systems to ensure they are zero carbon/electric equivalents such as ground and air source heat pumps, and solar thermal energy. As well as recommendations for upgrading each building's fabric and electrical equipment, such as wall and roof insulation, glazing, LEDs, smart controls for greater energy efficiency. The study also sought opportunities and tangible recommendations for onsite EV charging infrastructure and renewable energy generation from photovoltaic panels. The study results will be used to apply for funding and to prioritise carbon reduction goals for the council.

Electrification of MBC's Fleet (Action 7.1)

2.16 MBC has developed a Green Fleet Strategy. The primary objective of this Strategy is to enable the purchasing of vehicles that deliver the business needs and consider their whole life costs whilst minimizing their environmental impact. In support of this a feasibility study was conducted by SWARCO to ascertain the infrastructure required over the next 8 years to ensure that a change over to a fully electric fleet is viable at the depot without hindering operations.

2.17 The results of the study found there was a need to upgrade the electric capacity to 600KVA for an entirely electrified fleet by 2030, with a recommendation to instal a new substation on the Depot site. However, officers identified an existing substation near to the depot, and with basic low-cost ground works planned for Autumn 2022 can connect to the existing supply and increase the depot's capacity to 227KVA. This will be ample capacity for a new 50kw rapid charger to be installed on site as well as sufficient capacity for the medium-term needs of the depot's light vehicles EV replacements. The Depot currently has 6 electric vehicles in use with a further two ordered for delivery in Autumn this year. The higher capacity will ensure the depot operations will continue with rapid charging and the

depot is ready in the short to medium term for the changeover to a fully EV fleet.

Tree Planting and Rewilding (Actions 6.1 / 6.3 / 6.5 / 6.8 / 6.9)

- 2.18 National Government has [committed](#) to increasing tree planting rates across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year, with intentions to spend over £500 million of the £640 million Nature for Climate Fund on trees and woodlands in England between 2020 and 2025 to support the ambition to plant the right trees in the right places for the right reasons, sequester carbon, and the additional benefits they provide for nature and people.
- 2.19 Action 6.9 of the MBC Action Plan is to contribute to this target and to the KCC aim to plant 1.5 million trees in Kent and increase canopy cover by 2%. Maidstone Borough's proportion is to increase canopy cover from 16% to 18%. With the intention of expanding ancient forests and reconnecting existing woodland including urban woods, greening town centres, and where feasible increase tree cover on MBC estate land.
- 2.20 Maidstone Borough's current tree coverage is average in the UK and above average compared to other Kent districts. A 2% increase in canopy cover for Maidstone is equivalent to a total of 784ha needed for tree planting or natural regeneration by 2050 (Maidstone Borough total area is 39,342ha). At the rate proposed by the Central Government and the Climate Change Committee this would be the equivalent of planting or rewilding 47.4ha per year for the next 17 years (to 2040) or planting approximately 71,000 trees per year (at a rate of 1,500 trees per ha). Even with central Government support there will be a finance gap in cost of trees and planting costs, as well as a land shortage for rewilding and tree planting efforts. MBC acknowledges KCCs target and will continue to work closely with KCC to establish tangible targets.
- 2.21 MBC initiated a partnership approach with private landowners to plant trees to meet these targets. A call for tree planting sites was posted on the MBC website campaigns page in January 2022 inviting tree planting and rewilding project proposals. A total of 15 medium to large scale private landowners submitted proposals to MBC with proposed tree planting projects. Of the proposals received only 6 tree planting projects we scored as viable and shortlisted with a total combined 12 hectares of land offered by private landowners for tree planting. However, due to the legal terms and conditions of the agreement between the landowner and MBC - namely that MBC would retain ownership of trees, as well as the maintenance required, access needed, and stipulation that the trees must adhere to DEFRA guidelines and be left to grow for a minimum of 30 years - the majority of the private landowners dropped out of the MBC scheme. The number of interested private landowners has now reduced to just two (totalling 3 hectares). The cost effectiveness of the MBC planting scheme will be considered on small scale projects and MBC is awaiting confirmation from the landowners on whether the terms are accepted to go ahead with planting in autumn 2022. Officers are seeking other partnership opportunities on tree planning in the borough.
-

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 Option 1: Noting

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Option 1: Noting

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. Responding to the climate emergency is a key corporate risk. Ongoing monitoring of the delivery of the Strategy and Action plan is a key mitigation as the annual review of the action plan ensures continued accountability.

5.2 6 monthly reports will continue to ensure key mitigations and oversight continues

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 Approved, regular updates, as key projects emerge consultation with members and residents are managed as individual projects.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 Continue to update strategy and updates to members.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan Implementation Status and RAG
 - Appendix 2: Key Performance Indicators
-