

From: Susan Carey, Cabinet Member for Environment
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To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee, 19 May 2022

Subject: Plan Sea – scoping out the potential for a coastal and marine strategy in Kent

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: n/a

Future Pathway of report: n/a

Electoral Division: Kent wide

Summary: This discussion paper reviews the potential for the development of a coastal and marine strategy for Kent – “Plan Sea” – and outlines the considerations for taking this work forward.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Committee is asked to comment on the considerations laid out by this paper in respect of Kent County Council taking forward a coastal and marine strategy.

1. Introduction

1.1 With over 350 miles, Kent has one of the longest county coastlines in England and our identity is strongly linked to our coastal and marine borders.

1.2 The coastal and marine environment faces many pressures:

- water quality degradation from land-based and sea-based activities and development
- climate change impacts, such as warming waters and coastal squeeze¹
- coastal erosion and flooding
- habitat damage and loss
- over exploitation
- impacts of resource extraction
- recreational disturbance

¹ Coastal squeeze is when natural habitats are lost or degraded because hard structures prevent their landward migration in response to sea level rise.

For example, as the sea level rises and water encroaches further inland across the intertidal area, saltmarsh will be lost under that water but naturally the saltmarsh would migrate landwards so the area of saltmarsh would not be lost, it would just extend further inland. However, when there is a sea wall, say, that migration is prevented and the area of saltmarsh is “squeezed” or in other words reduced. Over time this area will be completely lost.

- invasive species
- damage to cultural and heritage sites

1.3 But the coastal and marine environment also presents opportunities that we are possibly not fully realising, such as:

- food production
- energy generation
- recreation (and associated physical and mental health benefits)
- carbon capture
- tourism
- other economic benefits, associated with its natural capital

1.4 There are a number of stakeholders with an interest in a clean, productive, and biologically diverse coastal and marine environment and a number of bodies with statutory responsibility for various aspects of its management.

1.5 Despite the stakeholders with an interest or responsibility, our coastal and marine habitats do not provide the healthy and productive environment we might aspire to and there is a lack of join-up across this strategic agenda.

2. Strategic approach for the coastal and marine environment

2.1 In 2020 the Kent Biodiversity Strategy was adopted with the goal that, by 2045, Kent is making its contribution to reversing the loss of marine biodiversity and delivering clean, productive, and biologically diverse oceans and seas through good management.

2.2 After two years since its publication, we are not in a position to confidently assess progress on this as there is no clear lead or champion within the county coordinating or monitoring efforts on this and no resources to dedicate to this.

2.3 This is not to say that there is not work ongoing, nationally and within Kent, by agencies with a responsibility, such as Natural England, Environment Agency, Marine Management Organisation and the Fisheries and Conservation Authority. However much of this work is seemingly done in isolation and with disparate engagement of ourselves and other bodies.

2.4 The 2021 Environment Act requires the development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Kent and Medway. Once secondary legislation is in place, Kent County Council will be responsible for developing this spatial strategy that will establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits. This work is expected to commence summer 2022. The extent to how much of the intertidal area will be included is currently unknown, but we understand that marine environments will not be a statutory requirement of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and a notable proportion of intertidal area is also expected to be excluded. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy is expected to supersede the Kent Biodiversity Strategy and consequently this has the potential to leave a further strategic gap for the marine and coastal environment in Kent. However, we understand that responsible authorities for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy may have the autonomy to include marine and coastal areas in the

Local Nature Recovery Strategy; but this work will not be supported by Defra with resources or data.

- 2.5 KCC previously (over 10 years ago) sought to develop various coastal strategies, including an integrated coastal zone management plan and coastal economic development plans, but establishing a strategy for the coastal and marine environment is challenging. The plethora of influencing factors, stakeholders, and statutory bodies, with different degrees of influence and responsibility, make it difficult to pull together a comprehensive strategy for this broad agenda.
- 2.6 We also don't want to duplicate the efforts of the agencies already operating in this area nor cross the lines of their statutory responsibilities.
- 2.7 It may therefore be sensible to have a narrow and carefully defined focus for any strategic efforts, based on risk and opportunity, which helps to join up agendas, and address any gaps of action, and develop this with the relevant stakeholders to deliver change where its most needed.
- 2.8 And whilst such a narrowly focussed strategy may not, for example, cover the further development of the county's thriving coastal-based social and cultural reputations and its economic development, the opportunities to support such agendas through the delivery of a healthy and rich coastal and marine environment could still be considered.
- 2.9 The development of a "Plan Sea" would have to secure not just the buy-in and support of all relevant agencies and stakeholders but their active engagement, in order to effect change. The implementation of the Strategy would heavily rely on these partners' statutory powers and resources, given the county council's lack of both.

3. Defining the focus of a coastal and marine strategy

- 3.1 To define what a coastal and marine strategy may address, and shape ambitions to what it may achieve, we need to:
 - Identify the key challenges for Kent's coastal and marine environment, the partners involved and the opportunities to influence.
 - Better understand the work and priorities for strategic partners and identify what's already being done.
 - Undertake analysis to identify the opportunities being missed.
 - Undertake analysis of the risks to the coastal and marine environment because of a lack of a strategic framework.
 - Analyse the external factors influencing this agenda.
 - Review what others have done elsewhere in UK.
- 3.2 As well defining the scope of Plan Sea, this work will enable us to identify wider strategies that relate to our coast and present opportunities for collaborative work in pursuit of shared outcomes.

- 3.3 This analysis will also help us to determine whether inclusion of the coastal and marine environment in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy will give us the strategic framework we need or whether a stand-alone strategy is required.

4. Financial and resource implications

- 4.1 Kent County Council's Coastal Officer role was deleted in 2016/17 as a result of efficiency savings, on the basis that the authority lacked any statutory responsibilities or role within this area. Owing to personnel changes, Kent Wildlife Trust no longer has its Marine Officer. The County is therefore currently without a dedicated resource with oversight of this agenda nor any resource to take this work forward. From a KCC perspective, development of this agenda will need to be identified as a future budgetary pressure.
- 4.2 Over 2022 and 2023, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy will be developed which presents a sizeable strategic task not just for Kent County Council but also our partners, who will need to be engaged in its development. In planning the development of Plan Sea, we need to be mindful of our strategic partner's capacity to fully engage in this work and the fact that priority will be given to the statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- 4.3 Preliminary discussions have been held with Kent Wildlife Trust about the potential to share the cost burdens of a marine and coastal officer role and work collaboratively on driving this agenda forward.
- 4.4 In the interim, the work outlined in section 3 to define the scope of any strategic approach could be commissioned. Although this would not likely be a costly commission, there still is no allocated budget for this initial work, but we anticipate would be in the region of £40k.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications.

6. Equalities implications

- 6.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required at this stage. Should a Strategy be developed, an assessment will be undertaken.

7. Other corporate implications

- 7.1 The development of specific action for the coastal and marine environment would be in support of the Kent Biodiversity Strategy, adopted by Kent County Council in 2020.

8. Governance

- 8.1 There are no governance issues.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 A coastal and marine strategy for Kent will need to be carefully defined – both in terms of purpose and scope. But such a framework does present opportunities to drive forward elements of this agenda that have previously not benefited from strategic or collaborative action.
- 9.2 Should such a strategy be endorsed, resources will need to be secured to take the work forward. It will also need to be coordinated with other KCC strategic work and the development of the statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

10. Recommendation(s)

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The Cabinet Committee is asked to comment on the considerations laid out by this paper in respect of Kent County Council taking forward a coastal and marine strategy.

11. Background Documents

- 11.1 Kent Biodiversity Strategy
<https://kentnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Kent-Biodiversity-Strategy-2020.pdf>

12. Contact details

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