

From: **Susan Carey, Cabinet Member for Environment**
Simon Jones, Corporate Director of Growth Environment and Transport

To: **County Council – 20th October 2022**

Subject: **Update on Kent's Plan Bee**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary: Kent's Plan Bee is the County Council's pollinator action plan. It sets out the contribution we can make in helping to address the decline of pollinator species. This report reflects on the achievements of the Plan over the past two years, since its adoption, and reports on actions to be taken in the coming year(s).

Recommendation(s):

The County Council is asked to note the success of Kent's Plan Bee in its first two years and the work that will be continued into future years.

1. Introduction to Kent's Plan Bee

- 1.1 In July 2019, Kent County Council adopted Kent's Plan Bee¹, our pollinator action plan, which sets out the contribution the County Council can make in helping to slow and reverse the decline of pollinators in Kent.
- 1.2 The Plan responded to the National Pollinator Strategy for England and the call to local authorities to use their regulatory powers and other functions to deliver, inform and engage others to participate in work that will benefit pollinators. The Plan recognised that the County Council, with its wide-ranging responsibilities, services and land holdings, was well placed to make a significant contribution directly through changes to its land management activities, but also provide leadership on this issue within the county in order to safeguard our native pollinators.
- 1.3 Consequently, Plan Bee set out to:
 - Make the county council a community leader in action for pollinators, leading the way in its own operations and property and by supporting others.
 - Ensure that pollinators' needs are always considered throughout Kent County Council's work and services.
 - Put the conservation of pollinators and their habitats at the heart of the council's land management and planning.
 - Make Kent County Council a significant contributor to the recovery of pollinator populations which will support biodiversity and the need of the county's agriculture.

¹ [Kent's Plan Bee pollinator action plan - Kent County Council](#)

1.4 The Plan aims to deliver these outcomes by taking action under the following objectives:

1. Manage the land it owns or controls or can influence in a way which can benefit pollinators' forage and habitat.
2. Use the planning system to protect pollinators and improve the habitats on which they rely.
3. Deliver a campaign to encourage others to take action themselves, raising awareness of the importance of pollinators in our lives and everybody's potential role in protecting them.

1.5 This report to County Council looks at the status of pollinators in Kent, updates members on what Plan Bee has achieved since its adoption and outlines the next steps in delivering on this important agenda.

2. The state of pollinators in Kent

2.1 Many plants rely on insects to pollinate their flowers – most plants cannot set seed without being pollinated (receiving the pollen, usually from another flower). It has been calculated that one of every three mouthfuls of food we eat depends on pollination, with the annual benefits of insect pollinators to the British economy valued at £691 million (Living with Environmental Change, 2014).

2.2 Despite their importance, pollinators are in serious decline as a result of habitat loss, pesticides and climate change. When the Council adopted Plan Bee, it was reported that nationally half of the UK's 27 bumblebee species were in decline and three were already extinct. And two-thirds of the UK's moths, and 71% of the UK's butterflies, were also in long term decline.

2.3 Just this year, the citizen science survey Bugs Matter² reported a decline in flying insects by 59% between 2004 and 2021. More worrying still was that in Kent this figure was a staggering 72%. They noted that these figures indicate a rapidly declining trend in insect abundance nationwide, which is consistent with research that has reported declining trends globally.

2.4 The 2021 State of Nature in Kent report³ notes some more positive news for some of the county's pollinators, but it also comes with notes of caution and concern.

2.5 Two of the nationally scarce butterfly species, the Heath Fritillary and Duke of Burgundy which are both found in Kent, have done well in the last decade, increasing in numbers and extending their range slightly. This is thanks to the efforts of conservation organisations and volunteers and some private landowners. Several other species, including the Adonis Blue, have also expanded their range.

2.6 Although these results appear to paint a favourable picture for Kent's butterfly populations, many colonies of our commoner butterflies have been lost as a result of habitat loss, fragmentation and changes in land use; for instance, the reduction in coppicing has made most woods unsuitable for many butterflies.

² [Bugs Matter \(kentwildlifetrust.org.uk\)](https://kentwildlifetrust.org.uk)

³ <https://kentnature.org.uk/state-of-nature/>

The report notes that the outlook for butterflies in Kent is bleak unless key habitats are protected from loss and linked together, to enable butterflies to move between them.

- 2.7 The abundance of macro moths in the south has shown a decline of 39% over the past 50 years (and this is similar for micro moths). However in Kent, trends for all moths show a mixed picture over the last 10 years, with more species showing an increase than a decrease.
- 2.8 Whilst some of the more generalist species of ants, bees and wasps appear to be on the increase, and the number of this group of insects recorded in the county is growing year on year because of new species colonising from continental Europe, this group of pollinators is generally suffering from downward trends in Kent. The report notes that with a changing climate, and more development pressures in the county, it is likely that the trend of decline will continue.
- 2.9 So, whilst there have been some gains thanks to the collaborative efforts across the county, it is still right to be concerned about pollinators in Kent and further step up the action for this important group of insects.

3. The impact of Kent's Plan Bee

- 3.1 Kent's Plan Bee began as a member led initiative by Sean Holden who now chairs a cross party member group which together with the Cabinet Member for Environment oversees this work. The delivery of Plan Bee is supported by officers from the Natural Environment and Coast Team within the Environment and Waste Division (GET) and has specialised input from a part-time officer, seconded from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust.
- 3.2 However, Plan Bee is a whole authority plan, and its delivery relies upon the efforts of many services, not least of all highways' soft landscape team and infrastructure's soft landscape team. Work in earnest began in spring 2020 and the below summarises some of the Plan's achievements over the past two years.

Action against objective 1 – manage the land it owns or controls or can influence in a way which can benefit pollinators' forage and habitat

- 3.3 In February 2022, it was agreed that the existing rural swathe cut regime of one cut per year would be changed to provide much greater gains for pollinators. At an additional cost of £300k per annum, the swathe cut moves to two cuts each year running March to May and September to October, allowing for the key flowering period and optimum time for foraging pollinators to be free of cutting activity. In order to provide the most benefit to pollinators, the programme of cutting will be tiered so that the verges that present the most value to biodiversity (for example Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Roadside Nature Reserves, Bee Lines and Bee Roads) will be cut at the earliest and latest periods of March and late October.
- 3.4 This step change in approach means that much larger areas and lengths of the network are now managed for pollinators, providing greater opportunity for

wildflowers and wildlife generally to be supported. By focussing on verges of higher value to pollinators (Bee Roads) or those verges in areas of known importance to pollinators (Beelines), we can ensure effort is targeted to where it is most needed and offer the greatest benefits. Consequently, over time, this new approach will create an extensive network of habitat mosaics across Kent which are interconnected and managed to optimise the range of habitats provided for pollinators across Kent's rural verge network.

- 3.5 Verge management along the Fastrack route in North Kent is being adapted specifically with pollinators in mind and, in particular, the rare Shril Carder Bee whose residence in Kent Thameside is one of just three locations in England where this pollinator is found. Along Fastrack's dedicated and shared bus route in the Dartford area, 10 pollinator road verges have been established and more are planned in Ebbsfleet and Gravesend, in addition to the installation of green roof bus shelters. Further to this pollinator planting, is the creation of the bee bus, a double decker on the route featuring the Shril Carder Bee and promoting the Kent's Plan Bee.
- 3.6 At Allington Household Waste Recycling Centre, species rich grassland and trees for the benefit of pollinators have been included in the landscaping and designed to provide forage and habitat throughout the whole year.
- 3.7 The land management plan for the closed landfill site, Shaw Grange (near Charing), has specifically included measures to provide for pollinators including only mowing parts of the meadow every two years to provide the structure needed by bees for sheltering and overwintering; and increasing the number of flowering, pollen rich plants by collecting arisings after the annual cut.
- 3.8 Kent County Council's country parks are managed for the benefit of biodiversity, and pollinators are an integral part of this activity. The grassland areas are managed to maintain flowering plants and grasses diversity, with cuts in late September/early October and cuttings removed to maintain optimum soil condition. The parks also provide extensive opportunities to engage with the public, with planted bee beds, interpretation and events dedicated to pollinators. At Brockhill Country Park (Hythe) habitat is specifically managed for the benefit of solitary bees to provide foraging and nesting opportunities.
- 3.9 Pesticide use is another aspect of land management to be considered. In 2021, the Council reviewed its pesticide use and found that there was no use of the damaging neonicotinoid. The Chairman of the Plan Bee member group and Cabinet Member for Environment also lobbied the UK, and other European Governments, to take a stand against permissions for emergency use of neonicotinoids and urged Kent MPs to take part in a debate about this pesticide.
- 3.10 The impact of the herbicide glyphosate on bee species remains under review. Despite the work of the Highways Soft Landscape Team in reviewing the industry and market and trialling weed control methods, no viable, effective, affordable and environmentally friendly alternatives have yet been found, and so it remains in use. Both the Kent County Council estate soft landscape contract renewal in 2022 and Highways weed control contract renewal in 2023 present opportunities to reduce the use of pesticides and further examine and trial alternatives to glyphosate.

3.11 Delivery of action under the land management objective does have its challenges, not least that existing contracts can limit the speed of change and that this change is often associated with an additional cost. The Kent County Council estate soft landscape contract renewal in autumn 2022 presents an opportunity to further extend action under this objective and ensure real changes across the county council's land for the benefit of pollinators.

Action against objective 2 – for Kent County Council to use the planning system to protect pollinators and improve the habitats on which they rely

3.12 In delivering against this objective, we have focussed on supporting districts and boroughs to adopt their own actions for pollinators. To assist this, the Plan Bee blueprint was developed, focussing on the range of opportunities that could be taken at the local level. The draft blueprint is currently being tested by working with Canterbury, Swale, Thanet and Gravesham Councils.

Action against objective 3 - to mobilise the people of Kent, to take action themselves; Kent's Plan Bee aims to help them to greater awareness of the importance of pollinators in all our lives and everybody's need and ability to act to protect them

3.13 To really deliver change for pollinators, we need action across the whole county not just on the land we own and manage. Therefore, mobilising the people of Kent has been a key focus of our work to date.

3.14 In 2021 we launched our Plan Bee Facebook page⁴, which provides a direct means to connect with interested people all over the county. The page is followed by over 1,500 people; in the past month, posts reached over 18,000 people. A dedicated communications plan sets out a rolling campaign to inform and influence. In addition, we circulate a dedicated monthly newsletter, circulated to over 2,300, which summarises news and information and provides advice on what the reader can do and what they might see that month. Further information is also available from the County Council website⁵.

3.15 Specific campaigns have included the 2021 public perception survey⁶, designed to help us understand what people understood about our pollinators and their thoughts on alternative approaches to green space management. This survey had over 5,000 responses plus returns and provided an interesting insight that has been used to influence future public engagement work.

3.16 In 2022, we launched a No Mow May pledge, where 336 individuals and 16 organisations across the county pledged to not cut their grass for the month of May. This amounts to a total area of land left uncut of 14 hectares/35 acres, which roughly equates to almost 500 tennis courts. Leaving grass uncut for this month allowed wild plants to grow and flower, providing forage, food plants and nesting areas for pollinating insects at a critical time of the year. The No Mow May pledge will be repeated annually and we hope that it will show an annual increase in participation and therefore gain for pollinators.

⁴ [Kent's Plan Bee \(facebook.com\)](https://www.facebook.com/kentplanbee)

⁵ [Pollinators - Kent County Council](https://www.kent.gov.uk/pollinators)

⁶ [Pollinator public perception survey report - Kent County Council](https://www.kent.gov.uk/pollinator-public-perception-survey-report)

- 3.17 In January 2022, the Kent Children's University Pollinator Challenge⁷ was launched. This is a 12-month programme of pollinator themed activities and learning for children aged 5 to 14. Although designed for the Kent Children's University programme, this activity pack can stand alone and has been shared with Kent's schools and promoted via the Facebook page and newsletter.
- 3.18 Plan Bee has also engaged with stakeholder and businesses across the county. Two Plan Bee summits have been held, in 2020 and 2021. Both attracted large numbers of attendees – the 2020 event was one of the Council's best attended online events that year with 240 people taking part – demonstrating the level of interest in this important agenda.
- 3.19 Kent Ambassadors have also supported the Plan's work. Penny Williams, from the Big Plan Group, designed Plan Bee's logo and brand and advised on the establishment of our Facebook site. Mike Bax hosted the Plan Bee Members Group at his farm in Shadoxhurst, so members could witness first-hand how land management can benefit pollinators.

4. Next steps for Kent's Plan Bee

Immediate opportunities

- 4.1 There are a number of immediate opportunities to progress Plan Bee's objectives within the Council. The Kent County Council estate's soft landscapes contract and pest control contract are both renewed this year (2022). The Plan Bee officer is currently working with the Highways Soft Landscape team on how these new contracts could be designed, so that the management of our estate presents better opportunities to support pollinators and limit potential impacts on them from maintenance activities.
- 4.2 Similarly, the Highways weed control contract renewal in 2023 will also consider options for reducing herbicide use and trialling alternatives.
- 4.3 The County Council's Plan Tree (tree establishment strategy) also presents opportunities to provide nectar forage for pollinators by increasing the number of Spring flowering trees and hedgerows within the overall tree planting across Kent.
- 4.4 On November 22nd, we'll be continuing the conversation about land management for pollinators by making this the topic of our annual Plan Bee Summit.
- 4.5 In relation to land management, we will continue work with Network Rail on the development of their largescale project to improve trackside management for the benefit of pollinators and wider biodiversity, and create corridors for wildlife throughout the landscape of Kent.
- 4.6 Work will continue with district and borough councils to deliver improvements for pollinator habitats at the local level through, for example, their management of greenspace, local plans and development management.

⁷ [Children's University \(kentchildrensuniversity.co.uk\)](https://www.kentchildrensuniversity.co.uk)

Update of the action plan

- 4.7 In reviewing Kent's Plan Bee, opportunities to strengthen the action plan have been identified and therefore an updated and renewed Plan will be developed over the autumn and presented to Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee before the end of the year.

Kent pollinator pledge

- 4.8 Kent's Plan Bee is intended to be done 'with' residents, businesses and organisations in Kent rather than 'for' them. The Plan Bee officer resource is therefore directed where it can make the most impact in sharing information on how people can make changes that will help pollinators.
- 4.9 The Plan Bee Facebook page and newsletter addresses this in respect of individuals **but there is potentially more that can be done** with parish and town councils, community groups and others that can affect land management on a larger scale.
- 4.10 Therefore, next year, Plan Bee will begin development of the "Kent pollinator pledge", a self-guiding toolkit with advice that enables the development of action to support pollinators. There will be dedicated online resources, with a portal where the pledges can be made, and those that have pledged will be listed. In the first instance this will be designed for, and promoted to, the county's parish and town councils and community groups but over the years specific guidance for new target audiences, such as schools, businesses, farmers etc, will be added
- 4.11 It is hoped that this will create a network of activity across the county and, through the pledges, we can monitor what is actually being done at the local level.

Monitoring for Plan Bee

- 4.12 Whilst we're able to identify the changes that have come about as a result of Plan Bee, we don't currently have a way of measuring the actual impact of these nor the progress being made. Therefore, the refreshed Plan will have a new objective, to monitor and evaluate, and will be accompanied by a set of monitoring measures.
- 4.13 Action under this new objective will include the establishment of annual pollinator surveys, using the using the UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme's flower insect timed count survey method (or something similar). Surveys will be set up at selected sites across County Council owned and managed land, to monitor the effect of land management practices on pollinator numbers and provide an indicator of the impact of Plan Bee.
- 4.14 This will not only boost the national survey effort but will also identify what of our own measures are most effective in boosting pollinator numbers. We will look to Kent County Council's Environmental Champions network and staff working at

the chosen sites for volunteers in the first place and full training and support will be made available. We also hope Kent Members will sign up to assist.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Kent's Plan Bee has delivered significant progress against its four objectives over the past two years. As operations are largely tied into contracts, the rate of change in respect of the way we deliver our services and manage our estate is progressive and will continue to be delivered over time. Despite this, some good gains have already been made and commitment of the Council to this agenda is well demonstrated, through both action and the additional budget secured to enable these actions.
- 5.2 The level of engagement with the Facebook platform, public campaigns and the two previous summits suggests this is a widely supported agenda. Therefore, the proposed development of a Kent Pollinator Pledge will help galvanise this support into measurable action at the ground.
- 5.3 The development of monitoring will help us more accurately measure what's being done, and its impact, so that we can direct resources to where they're most needed.
- 5.4 There is more to be done to help pollinators in Kent but we have excellent momentum already in the county to build upon.

6. Recommendation(s)

Recommendation(s):

The County Council is asked to note the success of Kent's Plan Bee in its first two years and the work that will be continued into future years.

7. Contact details

Report Author:

Elizabeth Milne
Natural Environment & Coast Manager
03000 413950
elizabeth.milne@kent.gov.uk

Relevant Director:

Matthew Smyth
Director for Environment & Waste
03000 416676
matthew.smyth@kent.gov.uk