

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

**To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee**

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

Key decision: No

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Electoral Division: County-wide

**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 provides an update to members and an overview of the plans for future work.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note and make comment on the content of this paper and its appendices.

## **1. Introduction to Kent's Plan Bee**

- 1.1 In July 2019, Kent County Council adopted Kent's Plan Bee<sup>1</sup>, 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.

---

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

- 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.

1.4 In November 2022, Kent County Council republished the Plan with updated objectives, reflecting the achievements to date and how the Council would build on these:

- Manage the land it owns, controls and influences in a way which benefits pollinators' habitat and forage.
- Work with partners across the county to better protect pollinators and improve the habitats on which they rely.
- Raise awareness of the importance of pollinators and the need to safeguard these vital insects, mobilising the people of Kent to take their own action within communities, workplaces, schools and homes.
- Monitor and evaluate its action for pollinators, so that we understand the impact of our efforts and direct continued action and resources to where they are most needed.

1.5 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.

1.6 Kent's Plan Bee is a cross-Council collaborative effort, relying on the actions of services with the greatest opportunities to assist our pollinators. In particular, the highway soft landscape team, facilities management, household waste recycling centres and country parks.

1.7 The delivery of Plan Bee is supported by officers from the Natural Environment and Coast Team within the Environment and Circular Economy Division (GET). Central to this is the, now, long-standing secondment from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, providing expert input to ensure our efforts are best informed and directed.

1.8 During 2024, a new officer was recruited by the Trust who would work for Plan Bee on a full-time basis. Whilst this resulted in a six-month hiatus to some of the initiatives, work did still progress where this was possible. The details of this and plans for the coming year are outlined in this report to Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee.

## **2. No Mow May 2024**

2.1 Plantlife runs the No Mow May campaign to encourage people to stop mowing for a month and to allow naturally occurring wildflowers to bloom. A lawn with long grasses and wildflowers provides food for pollinators, tackles pollution, reduces urban heat extremes and locks away carbon below ground.

- 2.2 Since 2022, Kent County Council (KCC) has promoted the campaign and encouraged both our own estate and the public to take part. The Council has also conducted surveys of Kent's residents and organisations to find out who is taking part, where they are based, and why they decided to stop mowing.
- 2.3 This year we received 324 pledges from residents and organisations seeing a 19% increase from 2023. It is estimated that 141,841m<sup>2</sup> land was pledged for No Mow May, with Canterbury once again remaining the top pledger and Folkstone and Hythe once again pledging the greatest area of lawn.
- 2.4 The main motivation for participation remained “growing more flowers for pollinators” for another year and was selected by 90% of participants. Other reasons chosen included wildflowers aesthetic beauty and practical reasons. The balance of ecological consciousness and visual appeal underscores the campaigns multifaceted impact.
- 2.5 This year, participants went beyond lawn maintenance and created wildlife zones and grew wildflower pots and planters. Additional actions such as these contribute to a more comprehensive ecological impact beyond the confines of lawns. Furthermore, 80% of participants had previously engaged in No Mow May campaigns - this high retention rate is positive for achieving sustained ecological benefits.

	2024	2023	2022
<b>Residents participating</b>	307	252	324
<b>Organisations participating</b>	15	8	16
<b>Total participants</b>	324	272	340
<b>Change from previous year</b>	19% increase	20% reduction	n/a
<hr/>			
<b>Areas pledged</b>	141,841m <sup>2</sup> (543 tennis courts)	131,510m <sup>2</sup> (503 tennis courts)	129,865m <sup>2</sup> (497 tennis courts)
<b>Change from previous year</b>	7.8% increase	1.2% increase	n/a
<hr/>			
<b>District with most pledges</b>	Canterbury	Canterbury	Canterbury
<b>District with greatest area</b>	Folkstone & Hythe	Sevenoaks	Folkstone & Hythe

- 2.6 Various Kent County Council departments actively participated in No Mow May this year. These departments included country parks, waste and recycling, KCC estates, and highways. Collectively, they preserved approximately 300 hectares of wildflower-rich grassland.

- 2.7 Notably, six country parks contributed 565,500m<sup>2</sup> of wildflower meadows and grasslands, allowing diverse wildlife to thrive. Kent Highways left more than 450km of road verges in rural and urban areas unmown through May. The soft landscape team within highways also monitored pollinators on specific unmown verges, aiming to understand the benefits of not mowing for pollinators and local wildlife.
- 2.8 There was also positive involvement from 36 Kent County Council estate-owned sites, including offices, libraries, and education centres.
- 2.9 The No Mow May campaign has witnessed a notable uptake in engagement, reflecting the growing commitment of the council, residents and organisations to pollinator conservation.

### **3. Public engagement 2024**

- 3.1 Since 2021, Kent's Plan Bee has engaged with the public through its Facebook page. The page now has 1,939 followers, with reach this year exceeding 56,000 people. Interaction peaked in May during the No Mow May campaign.
- 3.2 The Facebook page raises awareness of action that can be taken to help pollinators and also promotes what the authority is doing itself to deliver against Plan Bee's objectives.

### **4. Rare bumblebee sighting**

- 4.1 As mentioned above, Kent Highways have been undertaking monitoring of verges. Over the summer this survey had a confirmed recording of the Shrill Carder Bee on one of the Plan Bee conservation verges on Thompsett Way, Queenborough. This was the first recording sighting of this species on this verge.

The Shrill Carder Bee one of the country's rarest bumblebees with only a few scattered and isolated populations – with North Kent being one of these five sites. This record shows that action taken by Highways to extend pollinator habitat and forage, and use these as networks for the insects, through conservation verges does indeed deliver positive outcomes.

### **5. Work plan for 2024-25 and onwards**

- 5.1 With the Plan Bee officer now in post and working on a full-time basis, delivery under the action plan can continue.
- 5.2 A key element of the workplan for the next year is the introduction of monitoring and evaluation activity so that we are able to measure the impact of our actions.

Highways have already commenced work on this, but a wider programme of annual pollinator surveys will be established. 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.

This will not only boost the national survey effort but will also identify which 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 instance, and full training and support will be made available. We also hope Kent Members will sign up to assist.

- 5.3 Work will also resume on the Kent Pollinator Pledge - a self-guiding toolkit with advice that enables the development of action to support pollinators. 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

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.

- 5.4 The Plan Bee officer will continue to identify opportunities across the Council's soft estate to improve habitat for pollinators and will support services in designing and implementing management changes. They will also continue to work collaboratively across the county with partners to support strategic project work for the benefit of pollinators and encourage the uptake of pollinator action plans at the district level.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 Kent's Plan Bee sets out the County Council's intentions for how services and functions can be delivered for the benefit of pollinators. It is recognised that any changes must not place undue or new financial burdens on the authority.

- 6.2 Resources required for delivery of the work programme largely relate to staff time (including the secondment costs) – these are already identified within existing revenue budgets.

## **7. Legal implications**

- 7.1 No legal implications relating to this work programme have been identified.

## **8. Equalities implications**

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was completed for Kent's Plan Bee and was published at the time of the decision to adopt the Plan.

This identified that there will be limited negative impact from the Pollinator Action Plan and these impacts can be reduced or avoided all together with appropriate management.

## **9. Other corporate implications**

- 9.1 No other corporate implications have been identified.

## **10. Governance**

10.1 This is a paper for briefing purposes only.

## 11. Conclusions

11.1 Plan Bee is now in its fifth year as a formal action plan. Services continue to amend their approaches to management for the benefit of pollinators and, anecdotally, we are seeing the results of this.

11.2 The introduction of a more structured and coordinated approach to monitoring pollinators and the results of our actions, will provide us with a more complete understanding of where efforts would best be targeted and built on.

## 12. Recommendation(s):

12.1 The Cabinet Committee is asked to note and make comment on the content of this paper and its appendices.

## 13. Contact details

### Report and Appendices Authors:

Elizabeth Milne

Natural Environment & Coast Manager

[elizabeth.milne@kent.gov.uk](mailto:elizabeth.milne@kent.gov.uk)

### Relevant Director:

Matthew Smyth

Environment & Circular Economy Director

[matthew.smyth@kent.gov.uk](mailto:matthew.smyth@kent.gov.uk)