

From: David Wimble, Cabinet Member for (the Kent) Environment  
Simon Jones, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport

To: **Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 9 September 2025**

Subject: **Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

Key decision: **25/00075**

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: **For Cabinet Member Decision**

Electoral Division: **All divisions**

**Summary:** In 2023, Kent County Council was appointed the Responsible Authority for the development of the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This paper provides an outline of the Strategy's preparation, in advance of publication in October 2025.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for (the Kent) Environment to

APPROVE and ADOPT the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy, developed by Kent County Council as the Responsible Authority under the Environment Act 2021, subject to the formal endorsement by relevant supporting authorities

DELEGATE authority to the Director for Environment and Circular Economy in conjunction with the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy Board to publish the strategy and take any necessary actions to support its implementation and associated monitoring functions.

DELEGATE authority to the Director for Environment and Circular Economy in conjunction with the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy Board in consultation with the Cabinet member for Environment to make non-substantive revisions or updates to the strategy as appropriate during its lifetime

DELEGATE authority to the Director for Environment and Circular Economy to take relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of, and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision as shown at Appendix A.

# 1 What are Local Nature Recovery Strategies?

1.1 The Environment Act 2021 resulted from the urgent need to respond to the crisis facing our natural environment. The updated State of Nature report<sup>1</sup> in 2023 clearly demonstrated this need<sup>2</sup>:

- Abundance of 753 terrestrial and freshwater species has fallen on average by 19% since 1970.
- Distribution of flowering plant species has decreased by 54% since 1970.
- Distribution of 4,979 invertebrate species has decreased by 13% since 1970.
- Abundance of 13 species of seabird has fallen by an average of 24% since 1986.
- Of 10,008 species assessed, 2% (151 species) are extinct and a further 16% (almost 1,500 species) are threatened with extinction.
- Only one in seven of the UK's important habitats for wildlife were found to be in good condition.

1.2 Given these statistics, it is perhaps not surprising to learn that the UK is currently classified as one of the world's most nature-depleted countries.

1.3 Action to address this is not just needed for nature's sake but also for all the services we get from nature. We rely on the natural environment for the food, water and materials it supplies. It also regulates and supports our environment, by cleaning air, storing carbon, pollinating crops and supplying healthy soils for food production. And it provides society with cultural services of tourism and recreation, which in turn deliver physical health and wellbeing benefits. Many of these services have economic associations in the commodities they generate. In addition to this are the costs that would be incurred if we had to manufacture the benefits they bring.

1.4 Consequently, the Environment Act made a commitment to ending the decline of nature and for nature to recover. In 2022, the government published the Act's associated legally binding targets to protect our environment, clean up our air and rivers, and boost nature. For nature, these were:

- Restore or create in excess of 500,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitat outside protected sites by 2042.
- Halt the decline of species abundance by 2030. Ensure that species abundance is at least 10% greater than 2030.
- Reduce the risk of species' extinction by 2042.
- Increase total tree and woodland cover from 14.5% of land area now to 16.5% by 2050.

1.5 Recognising that any recovery of nature would need targeted, co-ordinated and collaborative action at the local level, the Environment Act set out the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies. These were seen as a

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<sup>1</sup> [stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report\\_2023\\_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf](https://stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report_2023_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The State of Nature report focuses on three measures of biodiversity change: abundance (the number of individuals), distribution (the proportion of sites occupied) and extinction risk. These measures are assessed for hundreds and in some cases thousands of species native to the UK, as the available data allow.

critical new tool for driving the national ambition to increase species abundance and reduce risk of species extinctions.

- 1.6 Across England, 48 Local Nature Recovery Strategies are being developed with no gaps or overlaps. They are a landscape scale strategy designed to agree local priorities and actions for nature recovery that collectively will provide a nature recovery network for England.
- 1.7 In 2023, the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs appointed Responsible Authorities to lead the development of these Strategies and provided grant funding to cover the costs. The development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy is led by regulations and statutory guidance.
- 1.8 The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs guidance states that a Local Nature Recovery Strategy will identify potential measures (actions) that could be taken to support the recovery of nature and specify the areas of the county where action is likely to provide the greatest gains. However, the Strategy does not dictate those actions nor instruct their implementation. It also does not force landowners and managers to make changes to the way they use and manage the land or their operations. Implementation of the proposed action is voluntary, but delivery will be incentivised by linking a range government grants and funding to Strategy priorities and measures.
- 1.9 The guidance also makes clear that whilst a Local Nature Recovery Strategy will have a mandatory role in informing future local plans, the Strategy does not offer any statutory protection to the mapped areas for nature recovery nor prevent development from happening within them.
- 1.10 Also defined by the guidance is the role that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy will play in Biodiversity Net Gain<sup>3</sup>. Biodiversity Net Gain will be more meaningful in terms of nature recovery if gains are not only situated in areas of greatest need but also deliver the action required. The Strategy maps and denotes these areas of “strategic significance” and the Biodiversity Net Gain metric incentivises delivery of the actions in these locations, by placing more value on gains that align with the mapped potential measures.
- 1.11 Following appointment as the Responsible Authority, Kent County Council commenced work in October 2023 to develop a Strategy that would:
  - Agree a set of priorities for nature recovery, with measures to deliver against these.
  - Establish a shared vision for nature recovery and the use of nature-based solutions in Kent and Medway.
  - Provide a framework for joined-up action, developed with those that will be instrumental in its delivery.
  - Set out an ambitious but realistic and deliverable strategy, linked to supporting mechanisms and finance.
  - Spatially frame the strategy for nature, focussing action to where its most needed and will deliver the greatest benefits.

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<sup>3</sup> Biodiversity Net Gain is a mandatory requirement that aims to make sure that development has a measurably positive impact on biodiversity. The “gain” is calculated through the use of a standardised metric, which identifies the biodiversity value of the land lost and the biodiversity gained.

- 1.12. The work was overseen by a Board (chaired by Kent County Council's Cabinet Member for Environment), a delivery group and a number of technical advisory groups.
- 1.13 The Local Nature Recovery Strategy statutory guidance clearly sets out the requirements of the document and its preparation, and states it must include:
- Strategy area description – sets the context and provides the justification for the priorities and actions the Strategy proposes.
  - Priorities for recovering or enhancing biodiversity.
  - Priority species – essentially, those species considered significant at either a local or national scale and in most need of recovery action.
  - Potential measures – the proposed actions that will deliver the priorities.
  - Mapped areas of particular importance for biodiversity – essentially, areas already under some level of protection and/or management.
  - Mapped areas that could become of particular importance to biodiversity (comprising mapped potential measures) – essentially, nature recovery opportunity areas prioritised at a county-scale.

## **2 Developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy – stakeholder participation**

- 2.1 A key requirement of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy development was the need for it to be done collaboratively, with stakeholders' and delivery partners' input. It was therefore decided that a participatory planning approach would be adopted from the very start of the work, inviting all stakeholders to participate at every stage of the Strategy's development.
- 2.2 One of the main ways stakeholders have been involved in the development of the strategy is through a series of 20 workshops, held at a variety of locations across the county:
- Pressures and priorities workshops (January-February 2024).
  - Priorities shortlisting workshops (May 2024).
  - Potential measures workshops (May 2024).
  - Health and access workshop (July 2024).
  - Making the Local Nature Recovery Strategies work for local plans workshop (July 2024).
  - Mapping workshops (September 2024).
  - Priority species workshop (October 2024).
- 2.3 The workshops were well attended, with representation from across a wide range of sectors that saw over 900 individuals from over 250 different organisations, bodies, businesses, affiliations etc. These included representatives from:
- Government agencies
  - Local government
  - Parish and Town Councils
  - Conservation NGOs
  - Species recorders and species groups

- Farming and land management
- Landowners (not farming)
- Community groups and individuals (friends of groups, community groups and residents)
- Marine
- Infrastructure
- Academia and education
- Recreation and access
- Business and commercial
- Health

2.4 The community sector has seen the highest level of engagement, followed by farming and land management, conservation NGOs and local government.

2.5 Of course, it is the quality of that engagement which is key, and the project has been overwhelmed by the level of input throughout all the events. Stakeholders themselves have valued the opportunity for this involvement, with many individuals attending all stages of the strategy development.

2.6 This participation was supported by other outreach and engagement work and we estimate that the reach of the project is in the thousands. The work included:

- A regularly updated website.
- Social media – Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.
- Monthly e-newsletter.
- Project launch.
- Sector specific online briefings at the start of the work and during the public consultation.
- Attendance of many conferences, events and meetings to reach and connect with stakeholders.
- Dedicated farmer and landowner mapping sessions (September 2024).
- Development of a schools learning and activity pack.
- Commissioning of original artwork, to illustrate what the ambitions of the strategy might look like.
- Online surveys.

2.7 Reports from the workshops, and other project outputs, are all available from [Strategy development - background information | Making Space For Nature Kent](#)

### **3 Developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy – mapping areas of particular importance for biodiversity**

3.1 The map of areas of particular importance for biodiversity was strictly defined by the regulations and only the county's nationally designated sites, local nature reserves, local wildlife sites and irreplaceable habitat could be included.

## **4 Developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy – identifying priorities and potential measures**

- 4.1 Before the county’s priorities for nature recovery could be defined, it was necessary to identify the pressures and challenges the strategy should be addressing. In addition, what outcomes people would like to see for nature, providing the beginnings of a priority longlist.
- 4.2 At the same time, assessment criteria to aid the prioritisation of this longlist was developed and feedback was sought from stakeholders to ensure this was a fair and equitable selection process. The criteria included whether or not the priority fell within the scope of the strategy to address, and whether it related to one of the pressures identified. Further, the criteria considered the local and national significance of the habitat, the contribution the priority would make to national targets, the urgency of action required, the vulnerability of the habitat to climate change and whether there was opportunity to deliver wider benefits as a result of the priority. This was applied to the priority longlist, creating a provisional ‘shortlist’ of 69 priorities.
- 4.3 Two further stakeholder workshops were held in May 2024 to review the priority shortlist. Although this engagement did not lead to any further refinement, it did confirm that the priorities provided the right focus for nature recovery in the county. These workshops also led to the development of a structure for the strategy.
- 4.4 The resulting structure was six principles, against which the potential measures would be framed:
- Better – improve the quality of our existing habitats and ensure they are in a healthy and functioning state; better conserve and safeguard what we already have.
  - Bigger – increase the size of our most valuable and important habitat sites.
  - More – establish new, nature-rich sites that not only provide more space for nature but also provide connectivity between existing core sites.
  - Joined up – enhance connections between, and join up, sites.
  - Nature based solutions – work with nature and use natural processes to tackle some of the socio-economic challenges our county faces.
  - Land management and land use – recognising the critical role private landowners, land managers and farmers have in delivering a better, more coherent and resilient wildlife network.
- 4.5 Input from stakeholders also assisted in the agreement that the Strategy’s vision would be formed by 10 high level ambitions:
1. Increasing the functional connectivity of high-quality habitats.
  2. Increasing the use of nature-based solutions to environmental and societal challenges.
  3. Land management and land use increasingly delivering nature recovery gains.

4. Species at the heart of habitat management, restoration, extension and creation.
5. Restoring, connecting and extending species-rich grassland.
6. Safeguarding successional habitats from loss and damage.
7. Bringing woodland, trees and hedgerows under active management and increasing cover and connectivity.
8. Ensuring freshwater habitats are clean, sufficient and healthy and restoring catchments' functions.
9. Providing for nature in urban environments.
10. Securing high functioning, natural and connected coastal habitats.

4.6 Underneath each of these sits the detailed, and habitat-specific, priorities.

4.7 Once the priorities were agreed, further workshops were held with stakeholders to identify potential measures (actions) which would deliver against these. Other experts and partners were also consulted, to ensure we had identified the most appropriate and complete set of measures required.

## **5 Developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy – mapping areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity**

5.1 The final stage of the strategy development was to identify the “areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity”. These are seen as the main purpose of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, identifying strategic locations for the recovery or enhancement of nature.

5.2 The maps focus the delivery of the identified potential measures to where it will deliver the greatest gains for nature, and the greatest benefits that result from having a healthy, functioning environment. These are the areas where the county collectively proposes effort, funding and investment should be targeted to deliver the ambitions and properties of the Strategy.

## **6 Developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy – identifying the county’s priority species**

6.1 To ensure the Local Nature Recovery Strategy sufficiently focussed on the recovery and enhancement of species, it specifically identifies priority species. To do this the work first identified threatened and other locally significant species within the county and then determined which of these species should be prioritised for recovery action.

6.2 This was a challenging task as over 1,500 species were identified in the first stage as being threatened or locally significant. However, the project was very fortunate to have over 30 of the county’s species experts involved in the work and from this long list, were able to determine a priority list of 141 species from a broad range of taxa. These were selected not only on the basis of need and urgency but also in consideration of whether action for them would also support the recovery of other species associated with their habitat assemblage. For each priority species, potential measures to support their recovery have been identified.

## **7 Public consultation and finalisation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

7.1 On 16th January 2025, an 8-week consultation was launched running until 12th March 2025, which received 330 responses.

7.2 Independent analysis of the consultation responses by Lake Market Research noted:

- The consultation received wide input and secured resident views that perhaps hadn't been heard to date, with the majority of individuals responding to the consultation not having been previously engaged in the Strategy development.
- The consultation revealed that those who had previously been engaged, had found it a positive experience.
- There was work to be done to improve the clarity and ease of understanding, with suggestions that the document needs to be shorter, easier to digest and navigate and different versions created for different audiences.
- An encouraging degree of satisfaction with the development process – 65% of all consultees agreed it had been sufficiently comprehensive, participatory and based on the best available information. Amongst those who had participated in the Strategy's development, agreement increased to 77%.
- A low confidence in the Strategy delivering nature recovery but this was largely a result of external factors outside the scope of the Kent & Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy, such as housing development, national policy and funding, rather than any failings with the Strategy itself.
- Strong agreement with the six principles and 10 ambitions, with around 90% of respondents agreeing with each principle and ambition.
- Strong agreement with the priorities and measures; support was particularly high for the potential measures.
- Reasonably strong agreement that the maps target action to the right places in the county and that the areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity focused action to where it should be prioritised.

7.3 In light of the consultation responses, no significant changes were made to the founding elements of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. There have been amendments made in response to comments received – the detail of all changes made (or not as the case is in some areas) are all detailed in the response to the public consultation report.

7.4 All reports relating to the public consultation can be found online at [Public Consultation Reports | Making Space For Nature Kent](#)

## **8 Final steps and publication of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

8.1 As per the Local Nature Recovery Strategies regulations, prior to publication the final Strategy and maps must be provided to Natural England, the county's planning authorities and our neighbouring responsible authorities (Sussex, Surrey, London and Essex) for a 28-day review period. This provides them with the opportunity to raise a "publication advisory notice" (essentially an objection to publication proceeding) should they a) consider that part of the final local nature recovery strategy cannot be justified based on the results of the



consultation and/or b) consider that the final local nature recovery strategy is materially deficient. Based on our lengthy engagement of, and work with, the county's planning authorities during the preparation of the Strategy, we do not anticipate issues at this stage. This review commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025.

- 8.2 We then will notify the Secretary of State of our intention to publish following this review, with publication in October 2025. There will be a Nature Recovery Conference, where the Strategy will be officially launched, in December 2025.

## **9 Delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

- 9.1 Following publication, the responsible authority role focuses on supporting the implementation and delivery of the Strategy and monitoring of its progress. The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs has provided a £135k (p.a.) grant for this new role, which Kent County Council will use to retain the staff resource associated with developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This will ensure the momentum and delivery partner engagement gained during the Strategy's development will be maintained into arguably the more important phase of the work – turning the ambition into action.

- 9.2 These officers are currently working on the development sector-focused toolkits that will support delivery partners' understanding of how the Strategy relates to their areas of influence and/or activity, and how they should use the Strategy to inform action for nature recovery.

## **10 Options (other options considered but discarded)**

- **Option 1:** Publish the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and support the implementation and delivery of the strategy and monitoring of its progress.
- **Option 2:** Do not publish the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, or support implementation and delivery of the strategy. This is not an option as this is a legally required document. Kent County Council was provided funding for the preparation of the strategy and hence to not publish would mean re-payment of the grant.

## **11 Financial Implications**

- 11.1 Preparation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Kent and Medway was covered by a Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs grant of £381,784.
- 11.2 Kent County Council is the Responsible Authority for the preparation of Strategy – it is not directly responsible for delivery of the actions and there are no associated financial burdens in this regard. Kent County Council does have a role post-publication in supporting the implementation and delivery of the Strategy. The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs has provided a £135k grant to cover the financial burden of this.
- 11.3 It is understood that national funding, grants and investment will be used to incentivise delivery of the Strategy. This may result in resourcing opportunities to deliver against our own corporate objectives including Plan Tree, Plan Bee

and Plan Sea (in development). Once the Local Nature Recovery Strategy is published, we will undertake a review of our pollinator action plan and tree strategy to ensure they align. Any potential future calls on KCC resource, be it staff time or match funding, will be considered on a case-by-case basis

## **12 Legal implications**

12.1 There is a mandatory requirement for all tiers of local planning to take account of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and reflect it in their local plan.

## **13 Equalities implications**

13.1 An equalities impact assessment has been completed and is appended to this report.

13.2 There are no negative impacts resulting from the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

13.3 The purpose of the Strategy is to recover nature and its habitat and species focussed. However, there will be additional benefits to people that result from a healthy and functioning natural environment. These are applicable to all people, not just those with protected characteristics - but potentially could have greater impacts for these groups when action is targeted in areas known to be in greatest need of these benefits - for instance, the use of nature based solutions to target air quality in areas with poorest quality would benefit all the local population but may have a greater impact on those with a disability protected characteristic where respiratory function is an issue.

13.4 All groups will benefit from improvements to the environment and reduced exposure to environmental risks such as pollution, flooding and heat stress. A reduction in these will be accompanied by improvements in health and wellbeing. Health and wellbeing benefits will also come from increased access to bigger, better, more connected areas for nature.

## **14 Other corporate implications**

14.1 The Local Nature Recovery Strategy aligns with a number of the authority's strategies, policies, services and land management. Whilst the strategy does not have any delivery implications, it may offer opportunities to secure funding where objectives align, and funding opportunities incentivise their delivery.

## **15 Governance**

15.1 Although prepared by the authority, this is not a Kent County Council strategy and therefore formal adoption is not required.

## **16 Conclusions**

16.1 Local Nature Recovery Strategies present a framework for nature that is genuinely linked to delivery mechanisms and financing opportunities. Consequently, the opportunity to address the decline of nature in Kent and Medway, focussing on our areas of greatest need and widest benefits, and

inform land use planning, so that nature's needs are fully considered alongside other considerations, is a welcomed one.

16.2 The development of the strategy with the extensive engagement of stakeholders who have the potential to influence and/or deliver the strategy's priorities, or who will be impacted by the outcomes, has proved an effective, albeit resource intensive, process. The real success of this approach will only be fully understood once the strategy is published, and we begin to see action occurring.

### **17 Recommendation(s):**

The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for (the Kent) Environment to

APPROVE and ADOPT the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy, developed by Kent County Council as the Responsible Authority under the Environment Act 2021, subject to the formal endorsement by relevant supporting authorities

DELEGATE authority to the Director for Environment and Circular Economy in conjunction with the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy Board to publish the strategy and take any necessary actions to support its implementation and associated monitoring functions.

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DELEGATE authority to the Director for Environment and Circular Economy to take relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of, and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision as shown at Appendix A.

### **18 Appendices**

Appendix A – Proposed Record of Decision

Appendix 1 – Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Appendix 2 – Equalities Impact Assessment for Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy

### **19 Contact details**

#### **Report**

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