

Kent County Council's Biodiversity Duty Report 2020-2025

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY KENT COUNTY COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, COASTAL REGENERATION AND SPECIAL PROJECTS

PART ONE - INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Why have we published a Biodiversity Duty report
- 1.2 Overview of Kent and the County Council
- 1.3 How has this report been compiled
- 1.4 Kent County Council Biodiversity Report 2020 to 2025 key headlines

PART TWO - REVIEW OF ACTION TO CONSERVE AND ENHANCE BIODIVERSITY BY KENT COUNTY COUNCIL IN PERIOD 2020 to 2025

- 2.1 Policies, strategies, frameworks and processes
- 2.2 Monitoring and evaluation of delivery against Kent County Council biodiversity priorities
- 2.3 Monitoring and evaluation of partnership work for nature recovery
- 2.4 Monitoring and evaluation of estate management for the benefit of biodiversity
- 2.5 Monitoring and evaluation of Biodiversity Net Gain delivery and consideration of biodiversity in planning

PART THREE - HOW KENT COUNTY COUNCIL INTENDS TO CONSERVE AND ENHANCE BIODIVERSITY IN PERIOD 2026-2031

- 3.1 New and revisions to policies, strategies, frameworks and processes during 2026-2031
- 3.2 Delivery against Kent County Council biodiversity priorities 2026-2031
- 3.3 Partnership working 2026-2031
- 3.4 Kent County Council estate management for the benefit of biodiversity in 2026-2031
- 3.5 Biodiversity Net Gain delivery in 2026-2031

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MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, COASTAL
REGENERATION AND SPECIAL PROJECTS**

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PART ONE - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why have we published a Biodiversity Duty report

The biodiversity duty is a legal requirement for public authorities in the UK to actively consider, conserve, and enhance biodiversity when exercising their functions. The 2021 Environment Act strengthened this duty, requiring public authorities to:

- consider what you can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity
- agree policies and specific objectives based on your consideration
- act to deliver your policies and achieve your objectives

More detail on complying with the biodiversity can be found online at [Complying with the biodiversity duty - GOV.UK](#).

Local authorities (excluding parish councils) and local planning authorities must publish a biodiversity report, with the first reporting period up to the end of 2025. After this, the end date of each reporting period must be within 5 years of the end date of the previous reporting period. The purpose of the biodiversity report is to:

- help everyone understand how we are collectively meeting shared goals to conserve and enhance biodiversity
- allow you to showcase the action you're taking to improve biodiversity
- show other authorities and the general public what they can do for nature recovery and share good practice

More detail on the requirements of the biodiversity report can be found online at [Reporting your biodiversity duty actions - GOV.UK](#)

Biodiversity provides us with many services' fundamental to our quality of life, maintaining:

- Life, e.g. regulating atmosphere; providing clean water and air and fertile soil; helping tackle climate change and flood management.
- Economy, e.g. providing food, fuel and construction materials; contributing to the attractiveness of the places we live, work and visit.
- Well-being, e.g. inspiring outdoor exercise and recreation; providing a free commodity to be enjoyed by all.

To these ends, the work described below, carried out by Kent County Council, is important both directly for biodiversity but also for all of us in terms of our health, economy and quality of life.

At the introduction of the strengthen biodiversity duty in 2021, Kent County Council stated its policies, objectives and actions through the Kent Biodiversity Strategy, Plan Bee Action Plan and Plan Tree Strategy. Work relating to these areas in the intervening period is described in this report along with many wider actions that have

been carried out by Kent County Council, all contributing the enhancement and conservation of biodiversity. The report covers the period 2020 to 2025.

1.2 Overview of Kent and the County Council

Kent County Council is one of the largest local authorities in England, with an annual budget of over £1 billion and serving a population of 1.6 million.

The county has a wide array of wildlife and habitats which contribute to the rich landscape of the county. Kent County Council is able to make improvements for biodiversity through land management on its estate, the range of services which it provides and the strategies and plans that it is responsible for.

Kent has a rich and varied biodiversity resource, with globally rare habitats such as the vegetated shingle of Dungeness, our ancient chalk grasslands and the marine chalk reef habitats around our coast. This wealth of habitats supports over 3,400 rare and threatened species, with some of these nationally rare and species only found in Kent within the UK.

When examining an area of this scale, and considering biodiversity, it is important to look at natural and functional areas, rather than those defined by administrative boundaries. The National Character Areas established by Natural England, follow natural lines in the landscape, defined by a combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history, and cultural and economic activity. The National Character Areas for Kent comprise the following, but more detail can be found in Part 2 of the Kent & Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

1.2.1 Greater Thames Estuary (NCA81)

The coastal habitats here, including mudflats and saltmarsh, are internationally important for their biodiversity interest, and support large numbers of overwintering and breeding wetland birds, rare plant and invertebrate species, and diverse marine wildlife. There is a contrast between the wild and remote coastal marshes and the industrial and urban developments, which are highly visible in the low-lying landscape. Previously developed land can regularly be found and in many areas this has turned into open mosaic habitat with rare plants and nationally rare invertebrate species.

1.2.2 North Kent Plain (NCA113)

This is the strip of land between the Thames Estuary to the north and the chalk of the Kent Downs to the south. It is a very productive agricultural area with predominantly high-quality, fertile loam soils, characterised by arable use. Traditional orchards, soft fruits and other horticultural crops grow in central and eastern areas, giving rise to name 'Garden of England'. There is an extensive area of ancient woodland around Blean, designated a Special Area of Conservation for sub-Atlantic and medio-European oak or oak-hornbeam forests.

1.2.3 North Downs (NCA119)

This chain of chalk hills extends from north west Kent, across the county and ends dramatically at the internationally renowned White Cliffs of Dover. The coast is of international significance with a Special Area of Conservation designation due to the rare maritime cliff communities found within the cliff face and on clifftops. The area includes all of Kent's chalk streams, an international rare habitat. These are the Nailbourne and Little Stour, Dour, North and South Streams in the Stour Catchment, the Great Stour below Wye, and the Middle and Lower Darent.

1.2.4 Wealden Greensand (NCA120)

The long, curved belt of the Wealden Greensand runs across Kent, parallel to the North Downs, around a quarter of the area is made up of extensive belts of woodland – both ancient mixed woods and more recent conifer plantations. In contrast, the area also features more open areas of heath on acidic soils, river valleys and mixed farming, including areas of fruit growing. A coastal stretch extends from Folkestone to Hythe, with a heavily developed hinterland. As a result, most of the coastline is protected by coastal defences. The exception is Copt Point, where the eroding cliffs are designated for wildlife and geology.

1.2.5 Low Weald (NCA 121)

This broad, low-lying clay vale is generally wet and woody. Ponds are commonly found and it is dissected by flood plains. Gill woodland is a particular feature and a valuable habitat, being scarce elsewhere in the south-east of England. The area is important for biodiversity, being rated among the most important in England for richness of bat species, Bullfinch and Lesser spotted Woodpecker, and several plants, including Spiked Rampion.

1.2.6 High Weald (NCA122)

This south west strip of Kent lies below the Low Weald and comprises ridged and faulted sandstone featuring a mixture of fields, small woodlands and farmsteads. Over a quarter of the area is covered by woodland, including gill woodland. Exposed sandstone outcrops along the wooded gills provide a nationally rare habitat and support an array of ferns, bryophytes and lichens.

1.2.6 Romney Marshes (NCA 123)

An open landscape of reclaimed, low-lying marshland, Romney Marshes is bounded to the south and east by the English Channel. The extensive marshes of the hinterland, now a mixture of arable and grazing land dissected by an extensive network of ditches and watercourses, support a rich flora and fauna. Dungeness is an area of international importance for its geomorphology, plants, invertebrates and birds. Home to some of the UK's rarest species, it is designated a National Nature Reserve, Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area and Site of Special Scientific Interest.

1.3 How has this report been compiled

The information in this report was gathered from a wide range of services and teams across Kent County Council, ranging from the Natural Environment and Coast Team, Country Parks and Countryside Management Partnerships to Flood and Water Management, Highways and Transportation, Public Rights of Way and Kent County Council Estate, but this is not an exhaustive list. This shows that biodiversity is something integrated across the authority and not an additional add on. Biodiversity supports many of the services the authority provides.

1.4 Kent County Council Biodiversity Report 2020 to 2025 key headlines

Below are ten of the top achievements led by Kent County Council for 2020 to 2025, as featured in more detail throughout this report:

1. **300,000 trees** have been planted as a result of the authority's tree establishment strategy, Plan Tree, and its associated partnership during the period 2021 to 2025.
2. **£1 million for tree planting** has been secured by Kent County Council from the Local Authority Treescape Fund between 2021 and 2025.
3. **Innovative methods for urban tree planting** to improve outcomes for newly planted trees have been trialled, including the Miyawaki method, which is now being utilised on various sites.
4. **450km of highway verge managed to support habitat for pollinators.** An officer has been seconded to Kent County Council from Bumblebee Conservation Trust during the reporting period to lead and support work relating to Plan Bee.
5. **Natural flood management delivered alongside new habitat**, with the creation of wetlands and installation of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)
6. **15 environmental projects worth £2.82 million** enabled by the Kent Downs National Landscape team between 2021 and 2025 with Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes fund.
7. **543ha of land managed for nature** by Kent County Council's country parks.
8. **1.25 million people engaging with nature** at Kent County Council Country Parks in 2024/25.
9. **360 ponds created and restored** by Kent Countryside Management Partnerships through the Natural England District Level Licensing Scheme for Great Crested Newts (2018 to date).

10. **Publication of England's 18th Local Nature Recovery Strategy** in November 2025, following 2 years of development with the participation of over 1,000 individuals, providing a strong foundation for future partnership-led action.

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PART TWO - REVIEW OF ACTION TO CONSERVE AND ENHANCE BIODIVERSITY BY KENT COUNTY COUNCIL IN PERIOD 2020 to 2025

2.1 Policies, strategies, frameworks and processes

During the reporting period, a number of strategic approaches and commitments to biodiversity have been adopted; others, that were already in place, influenced the direction of the council's work and the delivery of its services. These are discussed in the section below. They are presented in the following groupings, in order of publication during the report period:

- strategies and plans specifically related to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.
- environmental strategies and plans contributing to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.
- other council strategies and plans which include provision for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.

Kent County Council strategies and plans specifically related to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.

2.1.1 Kent Biodiversity Strategy 2020

Kent County Council hosts the Kent Nature Partnership, a strategic coordinating body, with an Executive level Board featuring a wide range of partners. In 2020, the Partnership, coordinated by Kent County Council, published the [Kent Biodiversity Strategy](#) with the following goals:

- rich and growing terrestrial biodiversity, underpinned by more resilient and coherent ecological networks and healthy, well-functioning ecosystems.
- clean, plentiful and biologically diverse freshwater and intertidal ecosystems underpinned by implementation of a catchment based approach.
- contribution to reversing the loss of marine biodiversity and delivering clean, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas through good management.
- widest possible range of ages and backgrounds will be benefiting from the mental and physical health benefits of the natural environment; and we will have inspired the next generation to take on guardianship of the county's biodiversity.

Kent County Council adopted the 2020 Biodiversity Strategy as its strategic framework for the maintenance, restoration and creation of biodiversity. The Strategy itself was owned by the Kent Nature Partnership's delivery partners and much of what was delivered in the county after 2020 for nature was framed around the objectives and targets of the Kent Biodiversity Strategy.

2.1.2 Kent's Plan Bee 2022

In November 2022, Kent County Council republished [Kent's Plan Bee](#), first adopted in 2019. Kent's Plan Bee is the county council's pollinator action plan, developed by the council to take the lead and encourage local communities to improve the food sources and general habitat for pollinators in Kent. Pollinators such as bees, wasps, butterflies, moths and hoverflies are vital for our food, economy and environment and we must act to reverse their rapid decline.

The purpose of the plan is to:

- make the council a community leader in action for pollinators
- ensure that pollinators' needs are always considered throughout our work and services
- put the conservation of pollinators and their habitats at the heart of our land management and planning
- make the council a significant contributor to the recovery of pollinator populations.

The republished Plan Bee added action on monitoring to its commitments, which now are to:

1. manage the land it owns, controls and influences in a way which benefits pollinators' habitat and forage.
2. work with partners across the county to better protect pollinators and improve the habitats on which they rely.
3. 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.
4. 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.

2.1.3 Kent's Plan Tree 2022

In 2019, Kent County Council made a commitment to oversee the establishment of 1.5 million new trees, one for every head of population in Kent. In 2022, the council published [Plan Tree](#), the strategy under which this target and that of 19% tree canopy cover in the county by 2050 would be delivered.

Through extending tree cover in Kent and delivering the strategy, the council aims to deliver the following objectives:

- Contribute to Kent County Council's, and the county's, net zero targets.
- Reduce and reverse the trend of decline in nature and loss of trees.
- Tackle the multiple threats to our trees.
- Deliver nature-based solutions to some of the county's challenges.
- Provide enhanced and improved recreation and amenity.
- Address the decline in trees outside woodland and decline in urban trees.

- Realise the economic benefits.
- Increase our knowledge and provide better protection.

The strategy also sets out some specific actions that Kent County Council will take to progress delivery of the ambitions and objectives of Plan Tree. These actions focus on:

- Delivering against the tree establishment target.
- Exemplar provision for trees on our own estate.
- Improving protection to trees in Kent.
- Improving our understanding of Kent's trees.
- Developing the Kent carbon offset market for unavoidable emissions.

The intention is that Plan Tree will be delivered by working in partnership with (but not limited to) district and borough and town and parish councils, the Kent Downs and High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Units, the county's Countryside Management Partnerships, Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, and environmental charities. We will look to bring together local communities, schools, businesses, and landowners to collaborate on tree establishment projects.

2.1.4 Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy 2025

In 2023, Kent County Council was appointed responsible authority for the development of the [Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#), which sets out the county's priorities for nature recovery and the recommended actions to deliver them. This spatially framed Strategy also identifies where in the county this action should be targeted to deliver the greatest outcomes for habitats and species. Following publication in November 2025, the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy replaces the Kent Biodiversity Strategy.

The Strategy recognises that in order for the county's nature to respond and adapt to the increasing challenges of climate change, as well as the other pressures and challenges it faces, the Lawton principles must be applied. The Strategy reframes these slightly to provide a hierarchy for action – better, bigger, more and joined up.

In applying these principles across the Strategy, it not only support the recovery of nature but also ensure that our habitats and species have the ability and space to respond and adapt to the impacts of climate change, by enabling dynamic habitats and increasing their resilience. It also means that there is room for nature alongside the many competing demands for land in our county, and that the many pressures facing nature are tackled with a more strategic and ecosystem-led approach.

The overarching principles of the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy are as follows:

- **Better** – improve the quality of our existing habitats and ensure they are in a healthy and functioning state by applying and resourcing better and appropriate management of them. We also need to better conserve and safeguard what we already have.

- **Bigger** – increase the size of our most valuable and important habitat sites, not only extending but buffering them, to protect them from the pressures of human influences.
- **More** – through habitat restoration and creation, 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, by improving the quality of the land between them, creating new physical corridors and establishing stepping stones.
- **Nature-based solutions** – work with nature and use natural processes to tackle some of the socio-economic challenges our county faces, maximising the benefits of nature recovery.
- **Land management and land use** – increase the number of landowners, land managers and farmers using nature-friendly and habitat-sensitive land management and land-use practices, recognising the crucial role they play in helping to deliver a better, more coherent and resilient wildlife network across the county.

The Kent and Medway Nature Recovery Strategy has 10 ambitions for nature recovery around which the more detailed priorities and potential measures are structured:

1. **Connectivity** – High-quality habitats are connected at both a county and local scale, providing more linked natural space for nature to thrive in and a landscape that wildlife can move through and adapt to change in.
2. **Nature-based solutions** – Through safeguarding, management and restoration of the county's ecosystems, we enhance our resilience to climate change, deliver environmental improvements, address health and societal inequalities, and promote wellbeing, while advancing nature recovery.
3. **Land management and land use** – Land management and land use throughout Kent and Medway not only meets the economic and social needs of the county but also delivers nature recovery gains.
4. **Grasslands** – Our existing grasslands are conserved, with appropriate management returned, to restore, connect and extend these habitats to deliver high-quality, species-rich areas across the county.
5. **Successional habitats** – The structural diversity of open mosaic (brownfield) habitat found on previously developed land and low-level scrub is safeguarded from loss and damage, for the benefit of species that rely on early successional habitats.
6. **Woodland, trees and hedgerows** – Kent and Medway's native woodland, trees and hedgerows are safeguarded from loss and under appropriate and active management, delivering robust ground flora and soil structures. A mixture of natural regeneration and new establishment improves connectivity and provides an even greater contribution to climate change mitigation and resilience.
7. **Freshwater** – Our freshwater habitats are clean, sufficient and stable, in a healthy and good ecological state that supports an abundance and diversity of species. Catchments' functions are restored to deliver a connected mosaic of wet habitats, improving water quality and managing flood risk across the county.
8. **Urban** – Nature plays a central role in shaping the county's built-up environments, with wildlife benefiting from a network of connected green, blue

and grey spaces, which also provide nature-based solutions to the environmental challenges of urban areas.

9. **Coast** – Coastal and estuarine areas are allowed to evolve, with natural processes and progression restored, to enable them to adapt and be resilient to climate change. Habitat succession is managed strategically and holistically, to minimise loss and support a range of high-functioning, connected coastal habitats.
10. **Species** – Habitat management, restoration, extension or creation is specifically targeted to halt the decline, and support the recovery, of the Strategy's priority and threatened species and in doing so, reduces the risk of losing species through extinction from the county.

Throughout the two year development phase over 1,000 people participated in face to face in workshops and other engagement events designed to ensure all stakeholders and future delivery partners had an active role in designing the priorities and measures for the county's nature and identifying where in the county they would deliver the widest benefits. Following, a public consultation, the Strategy was launched in November 2025 with an event attended by over 200 people. The Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy being the 18th of 48 strategies to be published across England.

Kent County Council environmental strategies and plans contributing to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.

2.1.5 Kent and Medway Low Emissions Strategy 2020

The [Kent and Medway Low Emissions Strategy](#), published in 2020, is a partnership strategy for how Kent County Council, in partnership with Medway Council and the Kent district councils, will respond to national targets and policies to drive a clean, resilient economy across the county.

Under priority eight on green infrastructure, the strategy aims to develop a multi-functional, natural capital opportunity and investment programme, which focuses on environmental projects that store carbon, increase climate change resilience, improve air quality and soil health and increase biodiversity.

2.1.6 Kent Downs National Landscape Management Plan 2021-2026

The National Landscape Unit is employed through and hosted by Kent County Council and works on behalf of the Government and the Joint Advisory Committee for the Kent Downs National Landscape (formerly Kent Downs AONB).

The Kent Downs National Landscape Covers around a third of Kent's land area. Kent County Council is sits on the Joint Advisory Committee of the High Weald National Landscape but does not host it.

The [Kent Downs National Landscape Management Plan](#) was drawn up to ensure that the natural beauty and special character of the landscape and vitality of the communities are recognised, valued, enhanced and strengthened.

2.1.7 Kent Country Parks Strategy 2023

Kent County Council run nine Country Parks and its [Country Parks Strategy 2023-28](#) was published in 2023.

The vision for the Kent Country Parks Service is “To provide an inspirational, accessible and sustainable countryside experience for all Kent’s residents and visitors”. This vision is supported by strategic aims, including to “provide a Country Park network of well-connected high quality and biodiverse greenspace across Kent”.

2.1.8 Environment Plan 2025

Kent County Council’s [Environment Plan](#), published in 2025, identifies six environmental goals (below) that are being embedding in its services. The aim is also to enable and inspiring all parts of the community to work together to deliver environmental step change.

- Goal 1: Deliver green energy and reduce carbon emissions
- Goal 2: Adapt to our changing climate
- Goal 3: Reduce flood risk and manage water resources effectively
- Goal 4: Protect and improve the natural and built environment
- Goal 5: Manage resources through a circular economy
- Goal 6: Conserve and promote Kent’s natural beauty and heritage

Under goal 4, the authority aims to drive nature protection and recovery across the county, reduce air pollution, ensure that our habitats are abundant with wildlife and plants and drive environmentally sustainable development. And under goal 6, ensure that Kent’s historical environment is sustained for future generations and promote public engagement with our unique countryside and natural beauty.

2.1.9 Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2025

The Council’s [Climate Change Adaptation Plan](#), adopted in 2025, recognises that whilst adapting to climate change is not the primary reason for restoring nature, it is one of many co-benefits that arises from doing so. Consequently the Plan notes that by delivering on activities to restore nature through partnership work, Kent County Council can help upscale the county’s climate resilience. It therefore includes the action to “deliver climate change adaptation benefits through nature recovery activities.

2.1.10 Environmental Impact Assessment process 2025

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EnvIA) pilot was initiated in early 2025, soon after formal agreement of Kent County Council's Environment Plan. The initiative derives specifically from the stated intention to embed the Plan's aim and six goals into decision-making. The aim of the piloted process is to:

- ensure that decision making complies with Kent County Council's environment strategies to manage risk effectively and secure benefits
- increase prominence of environment within decision making to normalise this as an integral topic
- ensure that decision makers can make well-informed decisions, based on full facts about impacts and trade-offs

The assessment includes a number of biodiversity considerations, including impacts/opportunities against Kent County Council's biodiversity priorities.

The pilot has concluded its first phase. More information on next steps for the assessment process are outlined in part 3.

2.1.11 Sustainable procurement toolkit 2025

During 2025, Kent County Council drafted a Sustainable Procurement Toolkit to support procurement teams and service areas within Kent County Council and within Kent's district and borough authorities. The overall objective is to improve the environmental quality of contracts. The toolkit includes specific reference to biodiversity considerations within procurement.

The Toolkit is currently going through a validation phase. More information on next steps for the assessment process are outlined in part 3.

Other Kent County Council strategies and plans which include provision for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.

2.1.12 The Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2018

Kent County Council's [Rights of Way Improvement Plan](#) (2018-2028), while largely focussed on improving access, has a number of actions that consider, protect and enhance biodiversity, including:

- prioritise maintenance on those PROW providing access to natural greenspace.
- support volunteering in greenspace and on PROW network. Tackle health disadvantage by promoting access to the natural environment and green space, beyond urban areas, providing connectivity to nature and cultural landscapes.
- work with stakeholders to create places where people are not impeded in undertaking physical activity, accessing nature.

- develop access which does not conflict with nature conservation interest and support mitigation measures which may require recreational pressure to be diverted from sensitive sites.
- working with stakeholders to minimise impact of use on sensitive areas i.e. SSSI and scheduled monuments.

2.1.13 Framing Kent's Future 2022

[Framing Kent's Future](#) was the council's strategic plan published in 2022 and in place until late 2025. The strategy prioritised economic recovery, infrastructure development, environmental protection and improved health and social care services.

Priority 3 Environmental Step Change, provided the council's strategic priorities with many specifically focused on biodiversity:

- work with districts to produce harder and stronger action plans under air quality management areas where they are required.
- improve access for our residents to green and natural spaces especially in urban and deprived areas and through our Public Rights of Way network to improve health and wellbeing outcomes.
- continue our work establishing new trees across the county to deliver Plan Tree's ambitions of 1.5 million trees and a 19% canopy cover over the next ten years to support the recovery of wildlife, provide nature-based climate solutions, and enrich people's lives.
- work with Districts to deliver quality biodiversity net gain across the county's developments and land management that makes a meaningful contribution to the recovery and enhancement of nature in Kent.
- lead the development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Kent and Medway, which will identify priorities for the restoration of biodiversity, map existing valuable areas of nature and make specific proposals to create or improve habitat and wider environmental goals.
- be a community leader in action for pollinators and develop Kent County Council's own estate for the benefit of these vital insects.
- work with partners to protect and enhance Kent's coastlines, focusing on schemes that will make our coastal environments attractive, safe, and sustainable for both our residents and our wildlife.
- continue to work with our commissioning partners to create the infrastructure and jobs that enable us to reprocess waste materials and produce energy within the county, in order to maintain a closed loop local economy.

2.1.14 Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2024

Policies to protect, enhance and restore biodiversity are included within the Development Management policies of the [Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2024-39](#), adopted in March 2025.

2.1.15 Kent and Medway Integrated Care Strategy 2024

Tackling the wider determinants to prevent ill health is a central part of the [Kent and Medway Integrated Care Strategy](#) and the natural environment is a big part of the wider determinants which have a positive impact on people's health. Wider determinants include everything from clean air and water to time spent in nature and having regular access to nature.

The Strategy notes that the Integrated Care Partnership, including Kent Public Health, will “plan, develop and regenerate in a way that improves quality of life for new and existing communities – across built and natural infrastructures, including housing, transport and the local environment”.

2.1.16 Reforming Kent 2025

In November 2025, a new strategic statement was agreed by the County Council – [Reforming Kent](#). This statement includes:

- protection of the countryside
- a focus on environmental policy of direct benefit to residents
- protection of the Kent environment with practical, affordable and visible improvements

2.2. Monitoring and evaluation of delivery against Kent County Council biodiversity priorities

This section describes work carried out across Kent County Council services during years 2020 to 2025.

2.2.1 Addressing the decline of pollinators – Plan Bee

Plan Bee has had a dedicated officer during the past five years, seconded to the Natural Environment and Coast Team from Bumblebee Conservation Trust. In addition to supporting council services to reduce their impacts on pollinators and take opportunities to enhance habitats for these insects, the Plan Bee Officer has also begun a programme of surveying and monitoring to determine what impact Plan Bee efforts are having and to assist in directing resources and time to where the greatest impacts will be realised. The officer has also promoted Plan Bee widely, including through events such as the Kent County Show. Below highlights some key outcomes of Plan Bee over the past five years.

Verge management:

- Have now introduced a tiered approach to when rural verges are cut, depending on the potential biodiversity and value for pollinators of the verge, balanced against the need for highway safety. Instead of cutting rural verges once a year during June and July, they are now once in spring and once in autumn, to allow

wildflowers to flower in summer to benefit pollinating bees and insects. Also cut at different times to help provide a succession of wildflowers over many months, so pollinators have food plants to feed upon for longer and can use our road verges to move between habitats. This is providing a network of 450km more stable habitat for pollinators across the county.

- For our urban verges, looking at how the highways service can effectively, easily and cheaply, improve biodiversity on a small number of large urban verges.

Actions include

- seeing how quickly nutrient rich verges can become successful low nutrient wildflower sites
 - trying plug planting and seeding with customised mixes to help speed up the colonisation of wildflower species on some verges
 - with developers, discussing and encouraging wildflower seed mixes or wildflower turving instead of traditional grass seed and turving.
 - reduction of number of cuts in urban areas from six to four where verges have bulbs planted, with typically first two cuts avoided in order to allow the bulbs to flower and store energy for the next season.
- Along Fastrack's dedicated and shared bus route in the Dartford area, 10 pollinator road verges were established. 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 Kent's Plan Bee.
 - 123 Roadside Nature Reserves, supported by a Kent Highways partnership with Kent Wildlife Trust.
 - Additional special measures to benefit pollinators take place on parts of the highway network where Roadside Nature Reserves or SSSI's dictate a different management.
 - Alternatives for weed control trialled however, no viable, effective, affordable and environmentally friendly alternatives have yet been found. Work continues on this - contract renewals may present opportunities to further explore pesticide use reduction and trial alternatives.

Waste management sites:

- Species-rich grassland and trees for the benefit of pollinators were included in landscaping for the newly opened Allington Household Waste Recycling Centre (2022).
- Management for the closed landfill site, Shaw Grange (near Charing), will provide for pollinators by including sheltering and overwintering habitat and increasing the number of flowering, pollen rich plants.

Country park sites:

- Kent County Council's country parks are managed for the benefit of biodiversity, and pollinators are an integral part of this activity with grassland areas managed to maintain flowering plants and grasses diversity and optimum soil conditions.
- Brockhill Country Park (Hythe) habitat specifically managed for the benefit of solitary bees, providing foraging and nesting opportunities.

- A program of monitoring of wildflowers on more than 56 hectares of grassland sites managed by Kent County Council Country Parks was undertaken, to assess their condition and to inform management.
- 20,000 mixed species were planted that will improve the food supply for pollinators.

Supporting others take action:

- Publication of the Plan Bee blueprint, focussing on the range of actions that could be taken at the local level and assisting in the development of a district/borough pollinator action plan.
- Publication of the [Community Pollinator Toolkit](#), primarily aimed at anyone who may be managing small areas of land and wish to enhance them in some way for pollinators and other wildlife - there are ideas inside that can work at different scales, from a window box to a playing field. It contains a wide variety of suggested actions together with links to more detailed information and organisations who can help.

Outreach:

- Plan Bee's outreach includes 2,000 followers on Facebook and over 2,000 also receiving the [quarterly newsletter](#). Both provide advice on action to take and information of pollinator activities..
- Over 5,000 people took part in the [public perception survey](#) in 2021 to help the authority determine the level of understanding and inform what support and advice was needed.
- Ongoing promotion Plantlife's No Mow May campaign, resulting in continued engagement of Kent residents, with hundreds pledging on a Kent register to not cut their grass. A review of [No Mow May in Kent](#) shows the increased and continued commitment to the campaign from the county, including:
 - 307 residents participating in 2024, a 19% increase on previous year.
 - 15 organisations participating in 2024, double that of the previous year.
 - 141,841m² of area pledged, equivalent to 543 tennis courts, a 7.8% increase on previous year.
 - 36 Kent County Council sites preserving 300 hectares of wildflower-rich grassland.
 - 450km of road verges in rural and urban areas unmown throughout May by Kent Highways.
 - Six country parks contributed 565,500m² of wildflower meadows and grasslands.
- Development of the [Pollinator Challenge](#) for the Kent Children's University, a 12-month programme of pollinator-themed activities and learning for children aged 5 to 14.
- Online Plan Bee summits in 2020, 2021 and 2022.
- Publication of [Pollinators of Kent](#), a guide to the insects that pollinate our crops, ornamental plants and wildflowers. It features some basic information on the different types of pollinator, how to photograph them and what to look out for at different times of the year.

Awards:

- Kent's Plan Bee was named by the government as a Bees Needs Champion in 2023 for its exceptional work in supporting our pollinators that are essential to our biodiversity. The Bees' Needs Champion is a government award, coordinated by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, that recognises and celebrates examples of exceptional initiatives undertaken by local authorities, community groups, farmers and businesses to support pollinators.

2.2.2 Increasing tree canopy cover in county – Plan Tree

Work is overseen by the Plan Tree Strategy Officer, with additional staff resource provided by external funding. Below highlights some key outcomes of Plan Tree since 2021.

Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund:

- Successful bid to the fund in 2022 for £299,642 to secure additional staff to the Plan Tree team until 2025 to lead partnership projects and funding bids to deliver against the Plan Tree planting targets.
- Land suitability and availability have been the biggest challenge, however this work has been successful because the staff resources of the Plan Tree team has enabled them to guide landowners through the entire process, minimising hassle and fitting planting projects into their already busy lives.

Local Authority Treescape Fund:

- Four successful Kent County Council bids, totalling £1 million, were secured between 2021 and 2025.
- Over 120 sites were utilised, including schools, public, and private sites, and farmer clusters.

Trees Outside Woodland project:

- Kent County Council was a key partner in the Trees Outside Woodland action research programme 2020–25. The project was funded by HM Government and delivered in partnership with The Tree Council, Natural England, Defra, and four other local authorities. The aim was to contribute to a reversal of the declines in trees outside woodland, helping to meet local and national targets for tree cover.
- Kent County Council has explored barriers to urban tree establishment and trialled innovative methods to improve outcomes for newly planted trees. These included 11 sites of Miyawaki planting of 6,655 trees, natural regeneration trials at four sites.
- The project also tested capital grant funding for new and established local community tree nurseries; explored tree distribution models over three years, focusing cost and tree survival rate; tested incentivise planting, with different engagement approaches; and tested natural tree regeneration for verges adjacent to the highway.

- Findings were rapidly incorporated into existing grant schemes, such as the Local Authority Treescapes Fund. Evidence gathered through the programme Kent County Council was part of, is now the largest dataset in the UK on non-woodland trees and is due to be made open source for the benefit of future research.

Delivery against Plan Tree planting target:

- The cumulative total for planting up to 2024/2025 is now 376,113 trees, planting at a rate of over 60,000 trees a year. If this planting rate is maintained, the target of 1.5 million new trees by 2050 will be achieved.
- Achievement of target is dependent on maintaining the same level of grant funding to support planting activity and the closure of the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund, Local Authority Treescapes Fund and Urban Tree Challenge Fund – all the main sources of funding for Kent to date – does present a notable challenge to continuing this level of tree establishment in the county.
- Tree planting has also been supported by funding from Tree Council, Network Rail, Social Value Exchange, Tree Production Capital Grant and Kent County Council Member's Grant.

Restoring Elms to the Kent landscape:

- The authority has been working with partners from Forest Research, Natural England, Forestry Commission, Making Space for Nature, Butterfly Conservation, Countryside Management Partnerships, Essex County Council, Farmer Clusters, and the Lees Court Estate to develop planting strategies.
- Work on recording White-letter Hairstreak butterfly to guide efforts in reintroducing disease-resistant elm cultivars across Kent and supporting ten farms in East Kent Downs where White-letter Hairstreak colonies exist. Notably, new sightings of the Large Tortoiseshell butterfly were reported, indicating a comeback in areas with surviving elm trees.
- Partnership working with NIAB Cambridge to conduct trials into micropropagation using protocols provided by Trevor Fenning at Forest Research, tailored to a Dutch elm disease-resistant clone from Kent.
- In planting season 204/25, 400 Dutch-elm disease resistant feathers were planted.
- In 2025, expression of interest submitted to Species Recovery Programme for a proposal supporting the recovery Dusky Lemon Sallow moth using disease resistant Elms. Invited to submit full proposal in 2026.

2.2.3 Restoration of chalk grassland

Kent County Council secured National Lottery Heritage funding for the project Old Chalk New Downs, running 2017 to 2022, covering 10,000 hectares, working with multiple landowners to improve chalk grassland. This is a threatened habitat rich in wildflowers and butterflies, which Kent is very important for, but has been lost on a large scale owing to lack of appropriate management needed for its maintenance

and retention. The project vision was to deliver a more coherent and connected chalk habitat landscape across the North Downs, addressing habitat fragmentation and degradation.

The project achieved this through:

- Increasing and improving chalk habitats' size, extent and condition
- Linking existing habitat patches by creating habitat corridors, buffers and steppingstones
- Ensuring the restoration and protection of the historic landscape to re-connect and protect the threatened habitats and increase biodiversity in the scheme area.
- Restoring other habitats which are vital for chalk grassland to thrive, particularly hedgerows, which can prevent erosion of chalk grassland by stabilising the soil and minimising run off.

Project outcomes included:

- 22 sites using connectivity grants issued by the project, using the HLF funding, to carry out restoration work.
- 16 land management packages drawn up, each agreed with landowners for 10 years to improve the quality and quantity of chalk downland.
- 33 sites across the project area to restore and better manage downland habitats which included chalk downlands, lowland meadows and woodlands.
- 7,423 metres of hedgerow replanted, planted from scratch and repaired and field hedgerow condition surveys carried out.

2.2.4 Nature-based solutions

Natural flood management techniques offer a relatively low-cost option to manage flood risk in rural areas, where landowners are willing to provide land and maintain them. These schemes often present a win-win opportunity for both communities and for biodiversity. Projects delivered during the period 2020 to 2025 by Kent County Council are detailed below.

St Katherines School

In June 2019, St Katherines School in Snodland, experienced extensive flooding causing damage to 18 classrooms, toilets, corridors and the library. A large attenuation basin and swale were built to intercept the surface water, store it and allow it to naturally infiltrate to ground. Spoil from the basin and swale were used to landscape the school creating amenity, education and biodiversity interest within the school grounds and seeded with a native seed mix. Rain gardens were built around the building and planted with a mixture of native shrubs.

Hildenborough and Grosvenor Park

In Grosvenor Park and Hilbert Woods, natural flood management methods were used to reduce flood risk to properties downstream. Leaky dams were constructed, mimicking the structures built by beavers, to hold back water and create ponding on

rivers and watercourses. The structure allows a flow of water to continuously pass underneath it, however when the stream experiences high flows these are held back by the structure slowing the flow of water. A large wetland area created by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council within Grosvenor Park, provides a natural flood management benefit by capturing surface water from the surrounding area. During intensive rainfall, run off from the parkland and the surrounding urban area would quickly make its way into the stream and fast flows within the stream could cause flooding downstream. The wetland area helps to hold some of this run-off releasing it slowly.

Snipeshill Flood Attenuation Scheme

Snipeshill experienced regular surface water flood events, with internal flooding to properties occurring during 1 in 2-year rainfall events. The greenspace adjacent to Prince Charles Avenue and Canterbury Road in Sittingbourne lies within a depression of the landscape, with surface water naturally collecting in this area before reaching properties and the A2 Canterbury Road. The existing highway drainage network and surface water sewer which serves the area was quickly overwhelmed in high rainfall events or when low rainfall events occurred in close succession. To reduce the risk of surface water flooding Kent County Council developed a design that integrates sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), biodiversity improvements, and aesthetic enhancements. The scheme includes a 1.26million litre infiltration basin and two roadside swale features which divert water from the highway to the basin. Wildflower planting and the addition of trees has added biodiversity value to the space which was previously amenity grassland.

Doddington Natural Flood Management

Natural flood management was used to reduce run-off within the steep catchment upstream of Doddington where 6 properties had previously flooded. A retention pond was created within an arable field and over 1500m of hedging and buffer strip was planted and created around arable and pasture fields. The project has provided better protection against flooding whilst reducing silt runoff from the fields, hedging and buffer strip along the field create important margins for biodiversity and wildlife corridors.

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) in Schools

In June and July 2024, SuDS planters were installed in schools to reduce the amount of surface water from roof drainage entering combined sewer systems. SuDS planters intercept roof surface water run-off before connecting to the drainage network at a reduced flow rate. Reducing surface water flows into the combined system helps to alleviate pressure on the existing drainage infrastructure which may be overwhelmed during heavy rainfall. The planters were planted with wildlife friendly plants to add biodiversity value and educational interest to the school.

Nutrient Neutrality

Kent County Council as catchment coordinator for the Stour catchment is working in partnership to address the nutrient impacts on the Stodmarsh National Nature

Reserve. Kent County Council has developed the Nutrient Neutrality Strategy for the catchment and is working with all stakeholders to develop mitigation schemes which can address the nutrient loading.

2.2.5 Access to nature

Kent County Council is responsible for a number of services that recognise and promote the benefits of access to nature. These are outlined below.

Country Parks

Kent County Council manage nine country parks with the strategic vision: “To provide an inspirational, accessible and sustainable countryside experience for all Kent’s residents and visitors.” and the supporting aim to “Provide a Country Park network of well-connected high quality and biodiverse greenspace across Kent”.

Access to nature outcomes for 2024/25 included:

- 1.25 million visitors
- 9,788 people attended events
- 1,600 volunteer days totalling 9,596 hours on heritage and conservation works
- 3,800 children attended education visits led by the education rangers
- 82 delegates trained in Forest School Level 1 and 3
- 1,980 people attended a meeting, community event or party in at park venues
- 21,000 people took part in the Park Run events

Explore Kent

Explore Kent is a Kent County Council led initiative that promotes outdoor activity and engagement with Kent’s natural environment. It works across public, private, and voluntary sectors to encourage residents and visitors to explore the county’s coastlines, countryside, parks, and public rights of way. Explore Kent aligns with public health, active travel, and environmental goals.

Explore Kent promotes has a strong digital presence with 165,000+ website visitors and 15,000 route PDF downloads in 2025.

Kent Green Action and Greener Kent

This was county-wide movement which came out of 2019 Year of Green Action. Kent Green Action encouraged individuals and groups to take climate and nature-positive actions, this included community clean-ups, tree planting, and biodiversity workshops. This campaign has now been wrapped up in the broader Greener Kent.

Greener Kent is a broader umbrella for Kent County Council’s environmental engagement, supporting climate resilience, nature recovery, and community empowerment. The Greener Kent campaign’s focus is on educating, advising and raising awareness around the environment and sustainability, boosting community engagement with sustainability actions and achieving the goals outlined in the Kent

County Council Environment Plan. This includes activities that connect people to nature:

- Tree planting - every planting season, the campaign has helped to recruit volunteers for the tree planting season. The campaign also supports recognition of different tree species, tree care knowledge and encourages community engagement through events.
- Promotion of national and citizen science campaigns including: No Mow May, the Big Garden Birdwatch, the annual Big Butterfly Count and Pollinator Monitoring Scheme Flower-Insect Timed Count.
- Green Spaces - promoting the use and maintenance of green spaces, parks, and nature reserves to support local wildlife and provide recreational areas for residents.

Greener Kent works with schools and community organisations to promote active travel and outdoor learning. In 2024-25, the Greener Kent Schools programme supported schools in developing a climate action plan; this included a whole term of support dedicated to actions for nature restoration, that schools could include in their plans.

The Greener Kent campaign is also supported by Kent County Council's library service, with public awareness events covering themes of nature and biodiversity among others.

Green Social Prescribing

Kent County Council also promotes and advocates green social prescribing, connecting people with nature-based activities to support mental health and wellbeing. Work has included:

- Collaborations with NHS partners, GPs, and link workers
- Mapping areas of poor mental health against accessible green/blue spaces
- Piloting digital platforms for self-referral to outdoor activities
- Supporting interventions like Wilder Wellbeing with Kent Wildlife Trust

In 2025, Kent County Council secured a Health and Nature Fund grant with the aims of:

- Supporting preventative mental health interventions
- Encouraging community engagement with nature
- Addressing health inequalities, particularly in coastal regions

To support this work, the authority has appointed two Health and Nature Officers. The project will offer grants between £2,000 and £10,000 to support green and blue space interventions that promote mental health and wellbeing across Kent. Applications are welcomed by organisations delivering nature-based activities that improve preventative mental health outcomes. A Level 3 Certificate in Nature-based Practice is also being provided, in partnership with Circle of Life Rediscovery CIC.

2.3 Monitoring and evaluation of partnership work for nature recovery

2.3.1 Kent Nature Partnership

Kent County Council hosts and provides officer support and funding for the [Kent Nature Partnership](#), a strategic coordinating body, with an executive level Board featuring a wide range of partners. These partners work together to deliver the priorities set out in the 2020 [Kent Biodiversity Strategy](#).

In 2022, the Partnership published its [State of nature in Kent report](#), a collaboration of the county's leading species and habitat experts, assessing trends and data and reporting on how Kent's nature is fairing in the face of some major challenges.

2.3.2 Countryside Management Partnerships

Kent's [Countryside Management Partnerships](#) help manage habitat and landscapes and link communities to those areas. Although hosted by Kent County Council with small annual grants, they are expected to be mainly self-sufficient and do this by securing funding and income. Volunteering is also key to the success of these partnerships. All partnerships have an ongoing programme of work – some of the key items for 2020-2025 are detailed below.

Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership –

- Creation of 87 ponds and restoration of 107, delivering great crested newt habitat for Natural England's district level licensing scheme between 2018 and 2025.
- Creation of a fish pass next to a substantial weir on the river Great Stour near Wye, allowing a greater number of fish to move up and down the river unimpeded and freeing passage for ten miles from Canterbury to Wye.
- Creation of a major meander in the river Great Stour section within in Victoria Park, Ashford, removing silt and encouraging a more natural river system.

Kent High Weald Partnership –

- Management and support of 150 hectares of local nature reserves and greenspaces in the Kent High Weald area for biodiversity and for community engagement and access. This has largely involved restoring woodland habitat through the control of invasive species and creating a healthier ecosystem through increasing structural diversity. Conserved and enhance areas of heathland, grassland and wetland, delivered by a team of local volunteers who are out twice a week all year round.
- Since 2020, created or restored 40 ponds, planted thousands of new trees and enhanced the biodiversity of urban areas through planting pollinator friendly plants and sowing wildlife seeds in urban greenspaces.

- Delivery of a programme of community engagement including volunteer opportunities for people to help their local biodiversity, learning events such as guided walks and training, outdoor education and forest school offer plus nature-based wellbeing programmes and a community allotment.

North West Kent Countryside Partnership -

- Management of a diverse range of nature reserves, river corridors, and community green spaces. Chalk stream and river habitat restoration, controlling invasive non-native species, improving water quality, and enhancing riparian vegetation to support aquatic biodiversity.
- Chalk grassland conservation, with scrub encroachment management and increase of wildflower diversity to benefit pollinators and specialist species such as the Chalkhill Blue butterfly.
- Weekly volunteering opportunities, public events, citizen science surveys, training and educational workshops.

Medway Valley Countryside Partnership –

- Volunteer groups work on weekly tasks to carry out conservation work on a diverse range of green spaces.
- Other work undertaken include species surveying, management plans and control of invasive non-native species.
- Citizen science projects and educational activities for all ages to reconnect people with nature.

Pond creation and restoration –

From September 2018 to April 2025 the Kent Countryside Management Partnerships have created 147 ponds and restored 213, a total of 360 ponds. This work has been done through the Natural England District Level Licensing Scheme for Great Crested Newts with money coming from developers through the planning system. Ponds are a minimum of 150m² and benefit a range of species. Nationally, Kent has had the greatest success with around 50% of ponds evidencing Great Crested Newts presence through eDNA monitoring in the first few years after work.

2.3.3 Kent Downs National Landscape Unit

Within an area as large and varied as the Kent Downs, there are many hundreds of individuals and organisations which have a role in managing the landscape, supporting local business and communities and enabling quiet recreation. Together the [Kent Downs Protected Landscape unit](#) plays a central, pivotal and convening role in realising the strategic vision for the Protected Landscape and overseeing the Management Plan.

The unit's work covers a much broader remit than nature – however, some examples of the unit's work between 2020 and 2025 for biodiversity include:

- Kent Downs National Landscape administered Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes fund from 2021 and through this funded 115 projects worth £2,820,244 up to March 2025. These projects achieve outcomes for people, place, climate and nature.
- Key partner in the Old Chalk New Downs project (see previous section for details).
- Key partner in the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme. Supported by over £5 million in funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Defra, and 13 partner organisations, the scheme has left a lasting legacy for both people and nature. Over the course of the project, significant strides were made in restoring wildlife habitats such as internationally important chalk grasslands.

2.3.4 Data, monitoring and designations

When conducting work for nature recovery and biodiversity, it's important to have a baseline of how nature is doing in the county. The Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre collects, collates and shares information about the county's species and habitats. Kent County Council regularly utilises this resource and makes an annual contribution towards the funding of the centre.

Kent County Council also makes an annual contribution to Kent Wildlife Trust for its maintenance of the Local Wildlife Site register and its management of Roadside Nature Reserves.

2.4 Monitoring and evaluation of estate management for the benefit of biodiversity

2.4.1 Country Parks

All of the nine country parks have five-year management plans with the aim to keep all protected land in good condition. Two of the parks are part of the new North Kent Woods and Downs National Nature Reserve which alongside adjacent land contains internationally important habitat. Three contain significant areas of land designated by Natural England as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and three are Local Wildlife Sites.

Land management for the benefit of biodiversity in the past five years includes:

- 543ha of land under positive management across 9 sites
- 51% of the land managed is nationally important SSSI or National Nature Reserve
- 600 ancient/veteran/notable trees under active management
- 20,000 mixed species planted to improve the food supply for pollinators
- Over 20 ponds are managed across the nine sites
- 7km of ride network managed with connected glades that link the areas of coppice

- Grassland grazing, coppicing and invasive species control underway
- Ten year woodland management plans for the woodland works
- Between 2022 and 2025, improvements to the woodland understorey at Shorne Woods County Park and connection of all pockets of woodland - an area of 32ha.
- Annual coppicing of 3.5ha of Sweet Chestnut across four sites annually on an 18-year rotation. All cut timber is used to heat the visitor centres or sold to the public as firewood.

2.4.2 Landfill sites

Kent County Council owns several closed landfill sites, with others in third party ownership. Some of these sites are still monitored by Kent County Council under waste regulations but have become good areas for wildlife. Pegwell Bay, Broomfield, Cryalls Lane, Tovil and Shaw Grange each have their own land management plans for biodiversity.

Shaw Grange near Charing is monitored on a regular basis and is significant from a biodiversity perspective as it contains grassland with low nutrient input, making it particularly good for wild flowers and butterflies. The main area of landfill has been capped by a geosynthetic clay liner and seeded with a meadow mix. Over the years, native saplings have been planted, reptile hibernacula installed, and a sown wildflower area created. The site is cut and collected annually, save for two areas that receive a biennial cut on rotation. This regime has seen an increase in pyramidal orchids for the yearly cut areas, and better conditions for overwintering species in the biennial areas.

2.4.3 Highways

The Kent Highways team manage the verges and trees in line with the ambitions of Plan Bee and Plan Tree. Consequently, their estate management activities are covered in section 2.2 under these two strategic priorities for Kent County Council.

In addition, Kent Highways have moved the rural hedge cutting from autumn to winter months, so berries remain on hedgerows for longer for winter-feeding birds. Most urban hedge cutting already takes place in autumn and winter. The Highways team identify the berry holding hedges, which we cut in summer, to see if we can delay cutting to the winter if this will still keep the roads and footpaths safe for users and clear of vegetation obstruction.

2.4.4 Libraries

Kent County Council libraries, run a variety of projects supporting biodiversity, though their green spaces and reading gardens, these include:

- Charing Library, Ashford - a wildlife garden with insect friendly wild plants for children and adults to enjoy and to look out for and record insects they see.
- Borough Green, Tonbridge - Reading Garden with a Bee friendly theme.

- New Ash Green, Sevenoaks - Sensory reading space, using recycled materials.
- Whitstable, Canterbury - decking and plants, a great space for class visits.

Many other libraries have courtyard gardens, grass areas and planting for pollinators.

The value of these areas goes beyond the direct value to biodiversity; these areas provide a place for people to connect with nature. This is particularly important for people who don't have gardens or access to greenspace near their homes.

Libraries are in a great position to reinforce messages about biodiversity by promoting further information on wildlife in the county and opportunities to get involved. Some Kent County Council libraries have also run children's activities focused around making bug hotels and planting beans and seeds.

2.4.5 Public Rights of Way and Access Service

Kent is blessed with a network of 6,900Km of public rights of way, footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic, providing unparalleled access to Kent's countryside and coast.

While public rights of way are highways first and must be passable at all times of year, they are often also nature rich corridors or have the potential to be so. The activities of the Public Rights of Way and Access Service are undertaken, mindful of the need to do no harm to nature when executing works through undertaking ecological assessments, investigations and seeking additional guidance where necessary.

The cutting height for vegetation clearance and the type of clearance undertaken takes account of ecology. Heavy scrub clearance and any hedge cutting is completed outside of bird nesting season. Fallen trees which are cleared are stacked nearby as habitat piles.

The projects that perhaps deliver most in respect of the nature recovery have focussed on the improvement of public rights of way and specifically surfacing in areas that are particularly sensitive/ vulnerable to footfall. For example, improvements to the footpath on the White Cliffs Dover and the King Charles III England Coast Path meant that footfall would be largely constrained to the surfaced path protecting the highly valuable grassland of the Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs SSSI.

2.4.6 Wider estate

Kent County Council owns land but also leases land out. A lot of this is hard standing or built up, but there are many areas which are suitable for wildlife. Some areas of Kent County Council estate are designated as Local Wildlife Sites or SSSI, meaning that any management needs to be carried out according to the guidance for these sites.

Many areas have grazing licences for horses' sheep and cattle which also present great opportunities for wildlife. Other areas have become covered in scrub or woodland, bringing additional benefits to wildlife, as previously developed land can offer particular benefits when nature starts to take over.

2.5 Monitoring and evaluation of Biodiversity Net Gain delivery and consideration of biodiversity in planning

2.5.1 Biodiversity net gain

Biodiversity net gain is a relatively new mandatory requirement that aims to make sure that development has a measurably positive impact on biodiversity.

During 2022, the Kent Nature Partnership (with funding from Kent County Council) commissioned a viability assessment of biodiversity net gain across Kent. The commission primarily focused on assessing the high-level viability of a range of development typologies at 10%, 15% and 20% biodiversity net gain targets both on and offsite based on a series of evidence based inputs. The purpose of the assessment was allow the county's planning authorities to understand whether targeting a higher biodiversity net gain than the statutory minimum of 10% is potentially viable in Kent.

During the preparation time allowed to planning authorities ahead of biodiversity net gains implementation, Kent County Council brought together all the county's planning authorities to fund, with the Defra biodiversity net gain grant, a shared Biodiversity Net Gain Officer who was hosted by the authority 2023-2025. During the time, the following collaborative items of work were delivered:

- Biodiversity Net Gain guidance for Kent and Medway
- Kent Biodiversity Net Gain site register
- Biodiversity Net Gain statement for Kent and Medway
- An interim guide for strategic significance
- A guide to defining significant on-site habitat for Kent and Medway
- Training for planning officers and planning committees

Following publication of the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy in November 20205, a guide for how to use the strategy and its mapping in identifying the strategic significance uplift for biodiversity net gain has been published by Kent County Council in its role as responsible authority for the Strategy.

Kent County Council has a statutory duty to achieve biodiversity net gain if for its own developments. At present these are mainly school development proposals and the biodiversity net gain if for these sites has primarily consisted of on-site tree planting and landscaping, secured by planning condition. Where this has not proved achievable, off site credit solutions have been approved.

2.5.2 Biodiversity in planning

Kent County Council runs the Ecological Advice Service, providing professional ecological advice to all the county's planning authorities, including Kent County Council's own planning service, Medway Council and Ebbsfleet Development Corporation and also supporting these authorities to deliver against the mandatory biodiversity net gain requirement for all new development.

In 2024-25, ecological advice was provided on 2,397 planning applications, including expert support on 582 biodiversity net gain submissions.

The Ecological Advice Service not only ensures that the county's planning authorities meet their statutory and legislative requirements for wildlife and biodiversity net gain, but also makes sure that gains are meaningful and directed to where there most needed and that other added value and features are recommended as delivered through development, such as native planting in landscaping and wildlife features built into the building design.

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PART THREE - HOW KENT COUNTY COUNCIL INTENDS TO CONSERVE AND ENHANCE BIODIVERSITY IN PERIOD 2026-2031

3.1 New and revisions to policies, strategies, frameworks and processes during 2026-2031

Many of the council's policies, strategies, frameworks and processes will remain in place during the next five year period. With Local Government Reform on the horizon, it is not possible to state with any degree of certainty the future plans for these and particular those with plan periods running out before 2031. Where changes are anticipated, these are detailed to the best of our knowledge below.

3.1.1 Kent's Plan Bee

The council's pollinator action plan will be reviewed to determine whether appropriate to reframe the plan within the context of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and potentially use the plan as a framework for driving action for the priority pollinator species identified in the Kent & Medway Nature Recovery Strategy, as well as the priorities and measures of the Strategy for key pollinator habitats.

3.1.2 Kent's Plan Tree

The council's tree establishment strategy will be reviewed to determine whether appropriate to reframe it within the context of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and potentially use the strategy as a framework for driving action for woodlands, trees and hedgerow priorities and measures.

3.1.3 Kent's Plan Sea

Kent County Council is leading on strategic work for our coastal and marine environment, by working across the county in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders and delivery partners.

Plan Sea will be a plan for the restoration and recovery of the county's marine and coastal habitats, developed by Kent County Council. It is currently under development but it is anticipated to provide a delivery framework for coastal and marine priorities and measures of Kent & Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Publication is planned for 2027.

3.1.4 Planning and Drainage policy

Kent County Council's Planning and Drainage policy which sets out how SuDS should be delivered within the Kent, will be updated in 2026/27 to reflect the update National Planning Policy Framework and technical standards.

3.1.5 Water Resources Strategy

A Water Resources Strategy for Kent is currently in development, with publication planned for 2027. The Strategy will consider the long term demands and how this can be met, whilst protecting water as a resource for a healthy and biodiverse environment.

3.1.6 Kent Downs National Landscape Management Plan

During 2026, the Kent Downs National Landscape team will conclude and publish their management plan review. As a planning authority, Kent County Council will support this process and adopt the management plan once finalised.

3.1.7 Environmental Impact Assessment process

Work will continue on refining the authority's Environmental Impact Assessment (EnvIA) process, with adoption and roll out of this tool expected within the next reporting period.

3.1.8 Sustainable procurement toolkit

In 2026, the Sustainable Procurement Toolkit will be finalised and adopted by Kent County Council and Kent's district and borough authorities.

3.2 Delivery against Kent County Council biodiversity priorities 2026-2031

Kent County Council's various environmental strategies and plans set out our plans for action over the next five year period and our wider ambitions which the authority will continue to deliver against. The below outlines some of the known actions for 2026-2031.

3.2.1 Delivering nature recovery at a landscape scale

Following publication of the Kent & Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy in late 2025, work by Kent County Council in its responsible authority role will now focus on delivery. This will include:

- Kent County Council Nature Recovery Team facilitating the delivery of Strategy by working with stakeholders and delivery partners, supporting project and funding bid development.
- Establishment of targets for nature recovery in Kent and Medway.
- Development of a monitoring and reporting approach for the Strategy priorities and measures.

- Establishment of the Kent Nature Partnership as an Executive for the Strategy's delivery.
- Working with the county's planning authorities, to ensure the Strategy is embedded within planning decisions and local plans and to support them in delivering on the Strategy themselves, in fulfilling their biodiversity duty requirements.
- North Kent Conservation Grazing Project, supporting the delivery of grassland ambition and priorities of Kent & Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy by addressing two barriers to the introduction of conservation grazing - the necessary infrastructure (fencing) and connecting graziers to land owners/managers.
- Supporting farmers, landowners, community groups, wildlife organisations and other key partners to embed the ambitions of the Strategy within their land management and land use planning and functions.

Kent County Council's priorities biodiversity for the next five years will be aligned with those of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and include:

- Connectivity – high-quality habitats are connected at both a county and local scale, providing more linked natural space for nature to thrive in and a landscape that wildlife can move through and adapt to change in.
- Nature-based solutions – through safeguarding, management and restoration of the county's ecosystems, we enhance our resilience to climate change, deliver environmental improvements, address health and societal inequalities, and promote wellbeing, while advancing nature recovery.
- Land management and land use – land management and land use throughout Kent and Medway not only meets the economic and social needs of the county but also delivers nature recovery gains.
- Grasslands – our existing grasslands are conserved, with appropriate management returned, to restore, connect and extend these habitats to deliver high-quality, species-rich areas across the county
- Successional habitats – the structural diversity of open mosaic (brownfield) habitat found on previously developed land and low-level scrub is safeguarded from loss and damage, for the benefit of species that rely on early successional habitats.
- Woodland, trees and hedgerows – Kent and Medway's native woodland, trees and hedgerows are safeguarded from loss and under appropriate and active management, delivering robust ground flora and soil structures. A mixture of natural regeneration and new establishment improves connectivity and provides an even greater contribution to climate change mitigation and resilience.
- Freshwater – our freshwater habitats are clean, sufficient and stable, in a healthy and good ecological state that supports an abundance and diversity of species. Catchments' functions are restored to deliver a connected mosaic of wet habitats, improving water quality and managing flood risk across the county.
- Urban – nature plays a central role in shaping the county's built-up environments, with wildlife benefiting from a network of connected green, blue and grey spaces, which also provide nature-based solutions to the environmental challenges of urban areas

- Coast – coastal and estuarine areas are allowed to evolve, with natural processes and progression restored, to enable them to adapt and be resilient to climate change. Habitat succession is managed strategically and holistically, to minimise loss and support a range of high functioning, connected coastal habitats.
- Species – habitat management, restoration, extension or creation is specifically targeted to halt the decline, and support the recovery, of the Strategy’s priority and threatened species and in doing so, reduces the risk of losing species through extinction from the county.

The Kent & Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy is for organisations and groups across Kent and Medway to deliver, but Kent County Council will work with stakeholders to help to facilitate delivery where needed and will also be embedding the Strategy across the Kent County Council initiatives and services.

3.2.2 Addressing the decline of pollinators – Plan Bee

Plan Bee will continue estate surveys and during the five year period deliver a monitoring report based on this annual surveys, with recommendations on new, revised and continued measures for county council owned land.

Following publication of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, work will also focus on land outside the council’s control, to develop projects that will support the recovery of the Strategy’s pollinator priority species.

3.2.3 Increasing tree canopy cover in county – Plan Tree

Continuing the restoration of Elms to the landscape will be a continued priority for the Plan Tree strategy. This will also deliver against the Local Nature Recovery Strategy priority to “return the ecological function provided by native trees previously prolific in Kent, by restoring those lost to disease, pests, climate change and drought”.

Projects will include:

- Folkestone Elms and White Letter Hairstreak project, in partnership with Butterfly Conservation.
- Supporting Tunbridge Wells & Rusthall Commons on an elm planting project.
- Phase 2 of disease resistance Elms cultivation project with Niam Cambridge.
- Saving the Dusky Lemon moth project (if successful at securing funding from Species Recovery Fund).
- Network Rail Community Tree Grant planting in 2026 of 240 Elms.

Maintenance, beating up, monitoring and reporting of trees planted in previous years will be ongoing for three years after planting. Any sites not meeting 75% survival rate will be restocked as and when appropriate.

Other priorities for the next five years for Plan Tree includes:

- Strengthening partnerships and mobilising private sector investment in Kent's green economy to enhance financial stability and encourage responsible investment.
- Preparing for water, carbon, and nature-positive projects, scaling up successful initiatives, and attracting buyers and investors, including support for sustainable farming practices.
- Understanding deer populations to protect young trees and promote forest health.
- Collaborating with the Tree Council, International Tree Foundation, TreeApp, and One Tree Planted to leverage additional resources.
- Encouraging urban tree planting to enhance green spaces in our communities.

3.2.4 Nature-based solutions

Kent County Council will continue to seek to develop and deliver small and large schemes which can deliver flood risk management and biodiversity improvements. Flood Risk Management schemes including the development of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and nature based solutions within the urban catchments of Folkestone, Swanley, Snodland and Gravesend will be developed 2026 onwards.

On water resources management, Kent County Council will be:

- Working with sports clubs to manage surface water flooding and pilot water harvesting for irrigation.
- Conducting water audits within schools and sports clubs to reduce water consumption.
- Installing SuDS in schools.
- Grey water harvesting retrofitting on council estate.

The Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy and biodiversity net gain now present further opportunities to integrate natural flood management and sustainable drainage with measures to deliver ecological improvements. Nature based solutions is an area of the strategy that strongly crosses over with flood risk management.

3.2.5 Access to nature

Ongoing work to promote access to nature whilst supporting biodiversity will continue alongside the following two projects:

- Public Rights of Way and England Coast Path projects that improve accessibility and protect sensitive habitats
- Green prescribing project - future plans include grant coordination and toolkit development, with the aim to make nature-based wellbeing support digitally accessible, inclusive, and easy to navigate for both individuals and health professionals.

3.3 Partnership working 2026-2031

3.3.1 Kent Nature Partnership

Working with the partners, the Kent Nature Partnership will be reformed in 2026 as an Executive for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy's delivery. The Executive will:

- Prioritise potential LNRS projects that would benefit from responsible authority's facilitation and strategic focus.
- Identify alignment of strategic LNRS projects with other priorities in county, that may result in investment financing opportunities.
- Identify opportunities to scale-up projects strategically across county.
- Champion and advocate to gain strategic support across county.
- Identify exemplar projects, best practice etc to be replicated across county.
- Receive reports and consider progress.
- Revise LNRS delivery priorities as appropriate, in light of monitoring.

Under the Partnership banner, Kent County Council will also develop over the next few years the following in support of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy's delivery:

- LNRS green finance & investment "hub" – aiming to connect projects to public and private funding sources, connect similar projects across county and broker projects, supporting projects into private finance and funding arrangements.
- LNRS monitoring - collation of monitoring to report on:
 - habitat creation and restoration
 - management and protection actions
 - specific actions for priority species
 - levels of private investment.
- LNRS comms and engagement – to promote and raise awareness of the strategy, promote funding/investment and project opportunities and promote progress against LNRS priorities.

3.3.2 Countryside management partnerships

Notable work streams and projects for the countryside management partnerships during 2026-2031 include:

- Stour Valley Restore - Kentish Stour Partnership are currently leading on an application for an Area Based Scheme grant of £1.6 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund . The scheme brings together over 30 partners, most of which are looking to deliver for biodiversity; majority of the delivery would occur over 5 years from 2028. Hedgerow Heroes project - Kent High Weald Partnership will be helping bring back lost hedgerows by working with CPRE.
- Kent High Weald Partnership will be working with Tunbridge Well Borough Council on local climate action to help restore nature and biodiversity in the Borough.

- North West Kent Partnership will be expanding habitat restoration projects, particularly in chalk streams and grasslands, improving water quality, and enhancing biodiversity.
- Medway Valley Countryside Partnership will be taking forward hedgerow and water quality projects and work within the new North Kent Woods and Downs National Nature Reserve.

3.4 Kent County Council estate management for the benefit of biodiversity in 2026-2031

Many of the areas described earlier in the report will be continued, however this delivery will be difficult in some cases with uncertainty of funding and strained local authority budgets. This is why the partnership working described elsewhere in the report and the exploration of green finance to bring in private money will be increasingly important.

For everything from country parks to closed landfill sites and the wider Kent County Council estate, the big opportunity going forward will be in linking to the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy, with the aim to establish connectivity between these Kent County Council sites and neighbouring landowners to provide a bigger network of corridors for wildlife.

3.5 Biodiversity Net Gain delivery in 2026-2031

The Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy will have a critical role in ensuring that future biodiversity net gain makes a meaningful contribution and is directed to where this contribution is most needed. The Strategy is designed to support the delivery of offsite biodiversity net gain, with strategic significance uplift incentive. This is likely to be a key driver for nature recovery and support bigger and more joined-up areas in which our wildlife can thrive.