

From: *Jamie Henderson, Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health*
Simon Jones, Corporate Director for Growth Environment and Transport

To: *Growth Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 9th September 2026*

Subject: *Kent Environment Plan Annual Report 2025-26*

Classification: *Unrestricted*

Past Pathway of report: *Environment Plan CPMG 11th August 2026*

Future Pathway of report: *Publication online*

Electoral Division: *County-wide*

Summary: In 2025, Kent County Council published the Environment Plan which outlined the authority's commitment to protecting and enhancing Kent's unique and diverse environment, ensuring sustainable economic and social growth, and improving the health and wellbeing of our residents. The plan established six environmental goals to be embedded into our business, whilst enabling and inspiring all parts of our community to work together to deliver environmental step change.

The Plan committed to an annual report, setting out what had been achieved against these six goals during the 12 month period. This is the first annual report, covering April 2025 to March 2026. The report also details the environmental work priorities for the year ahead.

This report to Cabinet Committee also notes some changes to be made to the published Environment Plan to align it with the authority's 2026 Energy Efficiency Plan.

Recommendation(s):

The Growth Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to NOTE the annual report and the priorities for the current year.

The Growth Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to NOTE the changes to be made to the published Environment Plan.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The 2025 Environment Plan outlines Kent County Council's commitment to protecting and enhancing Kent's unique and diverse environment, ensuring sustainable economic and social growth, and improving the health and

wellbeing of our residents. The plan established six environmental goals to be embedded into our business, whilst enabling and inspiring all parts of our community to work together to deliver environmental step change.

- **Goal 1: Deliver green energy and reduce carbon emissions** - Enable the delivery of green energy infrastructure in the county, reduce greenhouse gas emissions across KCC's estate and operations and collaborate with partners to achieve countywide net zero emissions.
- **Goal 2: Adapt to our changing climate** - Assess the risks and impacts of climate change and reduce the impact on our residents by adapting to Kent's future climate and more frequent severe weather.
- **Goal 3: Reduce flood risk and manage water resources effectively** - Mitigate flood risk and contribute to improving community flood resilience, sustainable drainage and water efficiency across the county.
- **Goal 4: Protect and improve the natural and built environment** - 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.
- **Goal 5: Manage resources through a circular economy** - Manage materials more efficiently by minimising waste and reusing and recycling materials, enabling the development of a circular economy in Kent.
- **Goal 6: Conserve and promote Kent's natural beauty and heritage** - Ensure that Kent's historical environment is sustained for future generations and promote public engagement with our unique countryside and natural beauty.

1.2 The Environment Plan goals are supported by improved and considered decision-making, commissioning and education and delivered via partnership, green investment, strategic planning, KCC buildings and assets and social value.

1.3 The Plan committed to an annual report, setting out what had been achieved against these six goals during the 12 month period. This is the first annual report, covering April 2025 to March 2026. The report also details the environmental work priorities for the year ahead. The annual report can be found in Appendix 1.

2. Delivery of the Environment Plan

2.1 The delivery of the Environment Plan is the responsibility of the whole authority and every service has an important role to play in this. Actions across the authority include the installation of infrastructure to reduce energy and water use, planning for the delivery of services so they are not hampered by a changing climate, changing land management to increase the availability of wildlife-friendly habitats, reducing the level of waste to landfill across our estate and advocating the value of the natural environment for well-being.

- 2.2 Such action requires the support, advice and expertise provided by the services of the Environment and Circular Economy division in Growth, Environment and Transport, who also act as delivery leads for the goals.
- 2.3 Additional support is provided by a network of individuals throughout the authority, which include Sustainability Leads and Environmental Champions. Senior Officer input and oversight is provided by the KCC Environment Board.
- 2.4 The Environment Plan delivery is the responsibility of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health and falls under the Growth, Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee. The Kent County Council Environment Plan Cross Party Members Group provides additional strategic, political and local insight into the delivery of key services and initiatives working towards the plan's six goals.
- 2.5 The Environment Plan also requires county-wide, strategic attention and collaborative working with partners external to the authority. Much of the work delivered for the county is underpinned by long-established partnerships. There are also two strategic groups – the Kent and Medway Environment Group (officer-led) and the Kent and Medway Environment Members Board (member-led).
- 2.6 Chapter 2 of the report provides specific detail on the roles of key KCC services in delivering the six Environment Plan goals, and the county-wide partnerships offering broader support of these.

3. Delivery against the Environment Plan goals in 2025/26

- 3.1 The report presents the full breadth of achievements in 2020/21 – see chapter three. Highlights include:
- LED lighting upgrades in two KCC-owned buildings, saving £20,000 per year.
 - 1.02 million kWh of solar energy generated from panels on KCC buildings – enough to bring over 5.1 million full kettles to the boil.
 - Secured £170k in funding from the EU Pathways2Resilience project to develop improved planning for the county's future water resilience in a changing climate.
 - Severe Weather Impact Monitoring System (SWIMS) brought in-house, saving the county council £9,000 per year.
 - £4.5 million from the government's Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund grant invested to offset nutrient neutrality impacts of new housing and development in the Stodmarsh Catchment and unlock stalled housing in the area
 - Improved over three kilometres of ditches across the county, to improve water flow and connectivity with main rivers and to improve drainage and reducing flood risk to highways and properties.
 - The Local Nature Recovery Strategy was published in November 2025, the 18th to be published of total 48 strategies being developed nationally. The Strategy, which sets the priorities for nature recovery and frames these spatially in county-wide maps, was developed with input from over 1,000

people representing a board range of stakeholders, delivery partners and interested parties.

- Plan Bee surveys discovered England's rarest bumblebee, the Shrill-carder, on KCC managed roadside verges. At our country parks we found three other rare bumblebees – the Brown-banded Carder, Red-shanked Carder and Ruderal.
- Managed the disposal of 675,077 tonnes of waste collected across Kent at Household Waste Recycling Centres and by the Waste Collection Authorities, with only 0.36% of waste sent to landfill and 41.5% of waste recycled, composted and reused.
- Launched a new food waste recycling campaign across Kent leading to an additional 5,292 tonnes of food waste being recycled and , increasing volumes on average by 18.1% compared to the previous period.
- Promotion of the King Charles III England Coast Path South East section, including 10 inclusive presenter-led short films visually showcasing the accessibility of the routes.
- Two new Changing Places, at Trosley and Brockhill Country parks.
- Major restoration completed at Meopham Windmill.
- 3,000 hours of community archaeology volunteering over the past year.

3.2 The report also includes measures of success in the form of key performance indicators – see table overleaf.

3.3 The indicators demonstrate the reliance of some of our environmental ambitions on external funding and the impact that loss of grants can have. Kent Plan Tree has seen a notable decline in tree planting in 2025/26 due to the end of the Local Authority Treescape Fund, Urban Tree Challenge Fund and a reduction in Tree Council grants, which have previously supported tree establishment within the county. Despite this slowing of planting, Kent Plan Tree has delivered 388,055 trees since 2021/22, with over £1 million of external funding secured to enable this. The team continue to seek new funding opportunities and have maximised available income from the remaining external grants in 2025/26 to continue this success.

3.4 The reduction in Explore Kent's digital reach in 2025/26 is primarily attributable to a decrease in recorded website users following the introduction of cookie consent measures, which reduced the number of users captured through website analytics. Despite this, visits to Explore Kent's social media channels saw a 154% increase. This social media growth reflects increased focus on expanding and engaging Explore Kent's digital audience, helping to connect more people with Kent's outdoor spaces, events and opportunities to enjoy the natural environment.

Goal	Key performance indicator	2024/25	2025/26
1 - Deliver green energy and reduce carbon emissions	Greenhouse Gas emissions (KCC estate/services and traded companies)	10,388 tonnes	9,227 tonnes
2 - Adapt to our changing climate	Number of climate change risks assessments completed	Not measured – new KPI for 2025	8
3 - Reduce flood risk and manage water resources effectively	Percentage of statutory planning consultee responses submitted to the local planning authority within 21 days (flood & water management)	92%	92%
4 - Protect and improve the natural and built environment	Percentage of local planning authority requests for advice from the Ecological Advice Service responded to within 21 days	Not measured – new KPI for 2026	
	Number of trees planted	149,945	11,942
5 - Manage resources through a circular economy	Municipal waste recycled, re-used and composted	42%	43%
	Municipal waste diverted from landfill	99.2%	99.6%
	Percentage of waste recycled, reused and composted at Household Waste Recycling Centres	49%	53%
	Mystery Shopping at Household Waste Recycling Centre Services	97%	97%
	Customer satisfaction with Household Waste Recycling Centres	97%	96%
6 - Conserve and promote Kent's natural beauty and heritage	Annual visits across KCC country parks	1.16 million	1.18 million
	Explore Kent digital reach	197,800 users	126,800 users
	Percentage of local planning authority requests for advice from the Heritage Service responded to within 21 days	Not measured – new KPI for 2026	

3.5 In addition to specific action against the six goals, work was also undertaken to support embedding the environment into how KCC delivers its functions. This included:

- Development of an Environmental Impact Assessment tool, piloted across a range of different KCC services. Work is currently underway to refine and finalise the assessment approach.
- Development of a Sustainability Toolkit, that integrates environmental considerations throughout the commissioning cycle, including among commissioners, procurement specialists, and contract managers.
- Strengthening the articulation of environmental requirements within high-profile procurement specifications, ensuring suppliers are given clear expectations regarding environmental performance and outcomes.
- Continued efforts to increase environmental awareness, understanding and capability across the organisation and wider county through a coordinated programme of governance, communications, engagement and training activity.
- Successful ISO 14001 recertification.

4. Priorities for Environment Plan delivery in 2026-27

4.1 The report presents a number of priorities to be taken forward across 2026/27 – these can be found in chapter 5. Examples of work for the year ahead include:

- Create a detailed Solar Strategy for the KCC estate, including funding options and ways to integrate community energy models.
- Commence development of a Kent and Medway Adaptation Framework to inform and align climate resilience across Kent and Medway.
- Draft the Kent 25-year Water Strategy and undertake a public consultation, prior to adoption in early 2027/28.
- Commence work to develop an action plan for the recovery of grassland habitats across Kent.
- Prepare Kent's waste services for major legislative changes, including Simpler Recycling, the Deposit Return Scheme and the UK Emissions Trading Scheme, ensuring services remain effective, compliant and financially sustainable.
- Expand and strengthen health and nature interventions to meet growing demand, with a particular focus on the Marmot Coastal Region. Evaluation of the 23 currently funded interventions will be completed by December 2026.
- Establish the country parks as recognised gateways to the North Downs & Woods National Nature Reserve, the Kent Downs National Landscape and the proposed UNESCO Global Geopark. Promote access and learning of the habitats and landscapes.
- Deliver the community archaeology and heritage interpretation activities for the Whose Hoo landscape partnership NLHF project, with partners.
- Implement the Environmental Impact Assessment process, to strengthen consideration of the environment role in KCC decision-making.
- Implement the refined processes to strengthen consideration of the environment role in KCC commissioning.

- Introduce a training plan promote understanding of KCC Environment Plan.
- Continue to promote sustainable behaviours and raise environmental awareness through targeted campaigns, engagement activities and partnership working.
- Develop a green finance strategy to secure investment for our environmental actions.

5. Changes to the Environment Plan

5.1 The Energy Efficiency Plan (2026) moves the focus from achieving net zero to improving energy efficiency across our buildings, fleet and operations, in order to deliver financial savings and reduce emissions. It is therefore necessary to amend some elements of the published Environment Plan¹, to bring it in line with the Council's new policy position.

5.2 The following changes will be made:

Section	Original	Amended
Goal 1	Deliver green energy and reduce carbon emissions.	Deliver energy efficiency and savings.
What we will do (goal 1)	Enable the delivery of green energy infrastructure in the county, reduce greenhouse gas emissions across KCC's estate and operations and collaborate with partners to achieve countywide net zero emissions.	Improve the energy efficiency of our buildings, fleet and operations, enable the delivery of green energy, reduce emissions and work collaboratively with partners on place-based energy projects.
Environmental outcomes	Achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions, significantly reducing the county's carbon footprint and improving air quality.	Changes in our energy consumption, supply and emissions that deliver improvements in our estate's efficiency, performance and resilience and contribute to air quality improvements.
	Facilitating green energy infrastructure, promoting the use of renewable energy sources and reducing reliance on fossil fuels.	
Growth outcomes	Investing in green energy and climate-resilient infrastructure, creating jobs in the county, stimulating economic growth.	Investing in energy efficiency, green energy sources and climate-resilient infrastructure, creating jobs in the county, stimulating economic growth.
	Successfully implementing green energy strategies, positioning KCC as a sustainability leader and attracting recognition and investment in future projects.	Successfully implementing energy plans and strategies that position KCC as a sustainability leader and attract recognition and investment in future projects

¹ [Kent County Council Environment Plan 2025](#)

- 5.3 These changes are made under the provisions included in key decision 24/00094 - Adoption of the Kent County Council Environment Plan , which delegates authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment to refresh and/or make revisions to the Strategy as appropriate during the lifetime of the strategy.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 Staff time will be the main resource required to for delivery of the priorities outlined in section 4.1 and will be undertaken by base funded staff from all services involved. Any revenue spend, will be found within existing budgets or from external grants – work does not place any new or unfunded spending burdens on the authority.
- 6.2 The amendments to the Environment Plan have no financial implications.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 There are no legal or LGR implications of the work priorities for 2026/27 nor the amendments to the Environment Plan.

8. Equalities implications

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was completed and published at the time of the Environment Plans adoption. The amendments to the Environment Plan do not require any changes to be made to the assessment. The original assessment can be viewed at [Environment Plan EqIA](#).

9. Data Protection and other corporate implications

- 9.1 There are no data or other corporate implications of the work priorities for 2026/27 nor the amendments to the Environment Plan.

10. Governance

- 10.1 The Environment Plan Cross Party Members Group will continue to provide strategic, political and local insight to the Environment Plan. The Environment Board will continue to provide the senior officer input and oversight of the Plan's delivery.
- 10.2 A second annual report will be provided to the cabinet committee in September 2027.

11. Conclusions

- 11.1 The annual report demonstrates the breadth of achievements across the Environment Plan's six goals since its publication in 2025, and the importance of the environment services within the Growth, Environment and Transport Directorate in enabling their delivery.
- 11.2 The report shows that delivery against our environmental goals also delivers financial savings and generates income for the authority.
- 11.3 Whilst progress has been made, there is a reliance on the buy-in and support of all services across the authority if real gains are to be achieved. And security of grants and external funding does pose a risk to future delivery – the development of a green finance strategy over the coming year will aim to address this risk.
- 11.4 Changes need to be made to the published Environment Plan to align it to the 2026 KCC Energy Efficiency Plan. However, these amendments do not pose fundamental changes to the goals and intended outcomes of the Plan.
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Recommendation(s):

The Growth Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to NOTE the annual report and the priorities for the current year.

The Growth Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to NOTE the changes to be made to the published Environment Plan.

12. Background Documents

- 12.1 The published Environment Plan can be found online at https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/214944/Environment-Plan.pdf

13. Appendices

The full Environment Plan Annual Report 2025/26 is appended.

14. Contact details *(please insert details below)*

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