

Kent County Council

Environment Plan 2025

Annual report 2025-2026 (draft)



Executive summary

<to be completed prior to publication>

DRAFT

1. Kent County Council's Environment Plan

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	What we set out to do in 2025
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.

Rescindment of the KCC net zero targets changes the context for our actions under goal 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 reducing emissions.

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.

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.

2. Services delivering Kent County Council's Environment Plan

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.

Such action requires the support, advice and expertise provided by the services of the Environment and Circular Economy division in Growth, Environment and Transport.

Additional support is provided by a network of individuals throughout the authority. Sustainability Leads are responsible for the development, coordination and delivery of environmental and sustainability actions within their own directorate or service area. They play a key role in identifying and managing environmental opportunities and risks, driving continuous improvement and monitoring progress to achieve environmental improvement. In addition, there is a growing number of Environmental Champions who advocate for environmental sustainability and promote awareness of environmental initiatives, campaigns, and volunteering opportunities. Senior Officer input and oversight is provided by the KCC Environment Board.

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.

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. Environmental improvement in Kent is overseen by two strategic groups – the Kent and Medway Environment Members Board (member-led) and the Kent and Medway Environment Group (officer-led). Sitting under this umbrella are a number of specific delivery partnerships – those relevant to each goal are detailed below.

2.1 Goal 1: Deliver green energy and reduce carbon emissions.

The **Energy and Adaptation** team reduces consumption, costs and environmental impacts by utilising external funding and grants to enable and support the delivery of sustainable energy infrastructure in the county and improve the energy efficiency of our buildings, fleet and operations – as set out in [KCC's energy efficiency plan](#). The team collaborates with partners across the county to respond to statutory UK climate legislation and drive clean, resilient economic growth under the framework of the partnership-led [Kent and Medway](#)

[Energy and Low Emissions Strategy](#). More broadly the team supports efforts to reduce KCC's environmental impact, and build in improved environmental resilience, through decision making and sustainable procurement.

Infrastructure is a key service in the delivery of goal one – the majority of our opportunities to secure a climate resilient and energy efficient future reside with KCC's facilities and wider estate.

Partnership work is delivered through the Kent and Medway Climate Change Network and Kent Sustainable Communities Network.

2.2 Goal 2: Adapt to our changing climate.

The **Energy and Adaptation** team works across the authority to support all services in assessing and understanding the risks and impacts of climate change, delivering against the council's [Climate Change Adaptation Plan](#). They also support the development of climate adaptation plans, in order to reduce the impact of Kent's future climate and more frequent severe weather on our residents. Supporting this is the [Severe Weather Impacts Monitoring System](#) (SWIMS), a data collecting tool managed by KCC which allows us to collect data about how services are affected by severe weather events and enables us to understand the impact of weather events and to plan better for the future.

Goal 2 is relevant to all services in KCC – the changing climate has the potential to present notable challenges for our service demands, buildings and other asset management, staff, supply chains and finance.

Partnership work is delivered through the Kent and Medway Climate Change Network.

2.3 Goal 3: Reduce flood risk and manage water resources effectively.

The **Flood and Water Management** team assesses and manages local flood risks from surface water, ground water and ordinary (small) watercourses. They reduce the risk of flooding to people and businesses through the delivery of flood risk management projects and programmes. This Lead Local Flood Authority Role is defined in the [Kent local flood risk management strategy](#). The team is a statutory consultee for planning, providing sustainable drainage and flooding responses to the county's local planning authorities. The land drainage responsibility is delivered by the team providing consenting of works to ordinary watercourse and ensuring ditches and watercourses are maintained appropriately to manage water flows and protect the environment. The team oversees a water resources programme, aiming to ensure long-term water resilience and support sustainable water usage for residents and businesses, and manages and coordinates the delivery of nutrient neutrality in the [Stodmarsh Catchment Strategy](#).

The use and promotion of nature-based solutions in flood risk and water management is central to the team's work, offering opportunities to also maximise benefits for other Environment Plan goals – in particular, nature restoration, protection and improvement of the natural and built environment.

Infrastructure, Highways, Public Health and Strategic Planning are key services in the delivery of goal 3. KCC is able to deliver flood risk management and water resilience within its own estates and influence betterment through partnership working, helping to deliver benefits to residents and businesses across the county.

Action is delivered through collaboration with the Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards and Water Companies, as the key risk management authorities to coordinate and manage flood risk and water resilience. The team also engages with environmental non-government organisations, including South East Rivers Trust and Kent Wildlife Trust, to build partnerships with wider stakeholders and deliver nature based solutions for water management and quality improvements.

2.4 Goal 4: Protect and improve the natural and built environment.

The **Natural Environment and Coast** team facilitates collaborative, stakeholder-led action that delivers better, bigger, more and joined up habitats under the framework of the county-owned [Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#). It also provides expert ecological advice to the county's planning authorities. The team works with internal partners so that a wide range of opportunities to conserve and enhance biodiversity are identified, committed to and delivered in order for the authority to fully meet its requirements under the 2021 Biodiversity Duty and specifically deliver against the aims of [Plan Bee](#) (reverse the decline of Kent's pollinators) and [Plan Tree](#) (to extend tree cover by 1.5 million trees and attain 19% canopy cover) across the KCC estate. The team also provides a strategic focus for the county's coastline and marine habitats and is currently developing Plan Sea, a strategic framework for joined up action.

Partnership work is delivered through the [Kent Nature Partnership](#).

The **Country Parks** team's management of the parks presents one of the greatest direct opportunities to deliver on goal 4 and, through the Country Parks, they provide a network of well connected, high quality and biodiverse greenspace across Kent. The team manages 534 hectares of land, over half of which is protected as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and three of the sites are within National Nature Reserves.

The KCC-hosted [Countryside Management Partnerships](#) and [Kent Downs National Landscape Unit](#) work in partnership to conserve and enhance Kent's landscape, countryside and coast through advice provision, project delivery and direct countryside management.

There are many services across the authority that make a significant contribution to this goal in the nature-positive way they manage the estate including **Kent highways, Public Rights of Way, waste facilities, libraries, schools, public health and infrastructure.**

Planning Applications Group and **Strategic Planning** also use the planning process to protect and improve the natural environment.

2.5 Goal 5: Manage resources through a circular economy.

The **Resource Management and Circular Economy** team delivers Kent County Council's statutory responsibilities as the Waste Disposal Authority, with the [Kent Waste Disposal Strategy](#) providing the long-term framework for delivering sustainable waste management services. Working closely with the county's district and borough councils, who collect the waste, the service manages the receipt, transfer, treatment, recovery and disposal of Kent's household waste through a network of eight Waste Transfer Stations.

The service plays a critical role in delivering sustainable resource management across Kent, ensuring that waste is managed in accordance with the waste hierarchy, prioritising waste prevention, reuse, recycling and recovery wherever possible. Through a strong focus on resource efficiency and circular economy principles, the team works to reduce reliance on disposal and maximise the value of materials that would otherwise be lost from the economy. A complex portfolio of more than 40 operational contracts cover waste transfer, treatment, recycling, recovery and disposal services. The service has been instrumental in supporting Kent's transition away from landfill and continues to pursue a zero-landfill approach for municipal waste wherever technically, environmentally and economically feasible.

A key statutory function of the service is the provision of Kent's [Household Waste Recycling Centre](#) network, with 19 sites across the county. The team is also responsible for the management and environmental stewardship of a network of historic closed landfill sites across Kent.

The [Kent Resource Partnership](#) leads and facilitates collaborative working across the entire municipal waste system, bringing together Kent County Council and all 12 district and borough councils. The [Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy 2026-2031](#), provides a shared vision and strategic framework for managing household waste across the county, improving environmental outcomes and delivering high-quality, efficient services for Kent residents.

2.6 Goal 6: Conserve and promote Kent's natural beauty and heritage.

Promote public engagement with our unique countryside and natural beauty

Kent County Council's **Country Parks** provide the county's residents and visitors with opportunities to explore and experience some of the best natural habitats and landscapes that Kent has to offer. [Kent's Country Parks](#) are 83% self-financing, with all income generated invested back into the maintenance and running of the Country Parks. The service maintains and improves the parks and associated facilities, to provide equity of

access to quality greenspace and support good quality of life, health and well-being. They also provide high quality environmental education, events and volunteering opportunities that promote engagement with the natural world and connect with local communities.

Explore Kent works to encourage more people to walk, wheel, cycle and connect with nature. By reducing barriers and improving accessibility, a wider range of residents have been able to use and benefit from Kent's natural spaces. [Explore Kent](#) is operated on a full-cost recovery commissioned model, generating £430k of external and commissioned income covering the entire cost of the service and projects. Explore Kent's health and nature work is strengthening links between nature and community wellbeing. This includes the Health and Nature Network of more than 250 partner organisations, specific health and nature projects in the [Marmot Coastal Region](#), building environmental stewardship and upskilling organisations through nature-based practice training.

Public Health is a key service partner in this work with Explore Kent, acting as a conduit to health and well-being providers and linking potential clients back to the services promoted and supported by Explore Kent.

The KCC-hosted [Countryside Management Partnerships](#) and [Kent Downs National Landscape Unit](#) undertake collaborative projects and programmes of work that improve accessibility and develop/promote sustainable countryside recreation. They also provide opportunities for greater enjoyment, engagement and understanding of Kent's countryside, towns and coasts through volunteering, training placements, event and education programmes.

Kent's historical environment is sustained for future generations

The **Heritage Conservation** team works across the county with different partners to [ensure that KCC's historic assets are conserved, enhanced, enjoyed and valued](#) by Kent's residents and visitors. The team helps communities access and enjoy Kent's heritage through a range of community-based initiatives, which raise awareness and understanding, and provide opportunities for involvement in their local heritage. The service delivers statutory and advisory functions including the management of the Historic Environment Record, provision of archaeological and built heritage advice, and support for planning and development processes. It also oversees the long-term care, storage and accessibility of KCC owned archaeological archives and heritage assets and manages community heritage projects. The team also hosts the county's Finds Liaison Officer and manages the Portable Antiquities Scheme and Treasure process for Kent

Infrastructure and Highways and Transport have key roles in delivering the county council's commitment to conserve the heritage assets that the authority owns. **Planning Applications Group** and **Strategic Planning** also use the planning process to conserve and promote heritage assets.

The service collaborates and works with a wide range of partners including local authorities, developers and communities to deliver the conservation of archaeological sites, historic buildings, and landscapes.

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

The below report sets out delivery against the key performance indicator(s) for each goal, outlines what work has taken place and notes the key achievement during 2025/26.

The report also details what has been achieved through partnership working during the past 12 months.

3.1 Goal 1 report: Deliver green energy and reduce carbon emissions

Enable the delivery of green energy infrastructure in the county, deliver net zero greenhouse gas emissions across KCC's estate and operations and collaborate with partners to achieve countywide net zero emissions.

Key performance indicator: Greenhouse Gas emissions (KCC estate/services and traded companies)	
2024/25	2025/26
10,388 tonnes	9,227 tonnes

The reduction in emissions across KCC's estate continue. Compared to the 2019 baseline (23,098tCO₂), KCC's emissions have reduced by 60%. Energy efficiency and replacement projects across the estate continue, as teams explore new opportunities and technologies. However funding for public sector decarbonisation is increasingly challenging to access, limiting the opportunities to build on the gains already achieved.

3.1.1 Key achievements in 2025/26

- LED lighting upgrades in two KCC-owned buildings, which will save £20,000 per year.
- Four additional EV charger bays installed at Oakwood House in Maidstone in September, bringing the total to 26 bays across 7 KCC sites.
- Generated 1.02 million kWh¹ of solar energy from panels on KCC buildings.
- KCC's solar parks continued to generate significant renewable energy with 27.5 million kWh² generated at Kings Hill Solar Park and Bowerhouse II.
- Switch Together Solar (formerly Solar Together), Kent's group solar PV and battery group-buying scheme, supported 498 Solar PV system installations on homes and small businesses, totalling 2.4 MW of installed capacity.
- Switch Together Solar enabled 36 retrofit batteries on residential and small businesses.
- KCC's [Energy Efficiency Plan](#) published in January 2026.

¹ Enough to bring over 5.1 million full kettles to the boil.

² The equivalent of over 8,000 households' typical annual electricity consumption.

3.1.2 Partnership working for countywide delivery in 2025/26

The [Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy](#) (ELES) sets out how we, 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.

In February 2025, partners agreed to refine the actions within the Energy and Low Emissions Strategy Implementation Plan with a focus on deliverability, measurability and relevance. This [renewed plan](#) for 2026/27 was published in February 2026. Achievements against the Energy and Low Emissions Strategy five target areas are presented in the table below.

ELES target areas	Progress in 2025/26
Carbon reduction	Local authorities across Kent and Medway continue to make strong progress in reducing operational emissions through renewable energy generation, building retrofit programmes, energy efficiency improvements and lower-carbon fleet technologies. Significant reductions have been achieved since the 2019/20 baseline, with several authorities reporting reductions of more than 30–60%.
Delivery and investment	Kent and Medway authorities secured and delivered over £34 million of identified investment and grant funding supporting retrofit, renewable energy, fleet decarbonisation, biodiversity and business programmes. Key milestones included progress on the Homes Retrofit Action Plan, expansion of Solar Together, delivery of grant-funded energy projects, and development of the Kent and Medway Local Area Energy Plan.
Residents and communities	Councils have continued to support residents through energy advice, fuel poverty interventions, home retrofit schemes and community engagement activities. Community participation in renewable energy, sustainability initiatives and climate action has grown, supported by programmes such as Solar Together, the Sustainable Communities Network and local community energy projects.
Governance and planning	Partnership working across the 14 local authorities remains strong, with progress on strategic initiatives including the Sustainable Procurement Toolkit, Environmental Impact Assessment, Kent Design Guide refresh and Local Nature Recovery Strategy. These initiatives are helping embed climate and environmental considerations into decision-making, procurement and future development.
Data and reporting	Work is now increasingly focused on developing a consistent approach to Scope 3 emissions reporting, recognising that supply chain and indirect emissions represent the largest remaining challenge for many authorities.

3.2 Goal 2 report: 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.

Key performance indicator: Number of climate change risks assessments completed	
2024/25	2025/26
(not measured – new KPI for report)	8

Work against the Climate Change Adaptation Plan objectives has focussed on assessing climate risks and impacts for KCC services, securing external funding and encouraging adaptation throughout Kent, with the development of the Kent and Medway Adaptation Framework commencing towards the end of the year. Assessments have identified risks in relation to assets, staff, service delivery and supply chain, leading to the development of action plans that work towards the mitigation of these risks. It is anticipated that action plans will be built into service delivery and added to team risk registers.

3.2.1 Key achievements in 2025/26

- Following adoption in November 2024, KCC's [Climate Change Adaptation Plan](#) was published in early 2025/26.
- Completed 8 climate change risk assessments, with a further 8 risk assessments in progress.
- Completed 6 climate adaptation action plans, with a further 2 in progress.
- 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.

3.2.2 Partnership working for countywide delivery in 2025/26

- Developed a pioneering new method with the Canadian University of Waterloo to assess the impacts of climate change on heritage assets.

3.3. Goal 3 report: 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.

Key performance indicator: Percentage of statutory planning consultee responses submitted to the local planning authority within 21 days (flood & water management)	
2024/25	2025/26
92%	92%

The *National Planning Policy Framework* has strengthened planning policy for sustainable drainage, removing the previous size restrictions on developments and expanding sustainable drainage systems expectations to projects of all scales. It requires applications to control flow rates, reduce runoff volumes, and deliver multifunctional environmental benefits. This new policy helps to underpin the planning responses from the authority and ensure betterment across new development.

The *Cunliffe Report* and *A new vision for water* white paper will see a major overhaul of the water sector and is welcomed as opportunity to shape a more sustainable and resilient future for water stressed areas such as Kent. In response, KCC continues to develop the Kent 25 year water strategy, which will identify how these changes will be implemented against the challenges the county faces.

3.3.1 Key achievements in 2025/26

- £4.5 million from the government's Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund grant has been invested to offset the nutrient neutrality impacts of new housing and development in the Stodmarsh Catchment and unlock stalled housing in the area.
- Secured £100k of external funding to deliver surface water flood risk management projects delivering improved protection in Tunbridge Wells, Sittingbourne and Folkestone from frequent flooding.
- The Flood and Water team consented to 31 land drainage projects and answered 73 land drainage enquiries.
- Investigated options for flood risk management and sustainable drainage schemes across catchments to inform future delivery programmes in Gravesend, Folkestone, Snodland, Swanley and Ulcombe to better protect over 100 properties.
- 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.

3.3.2 Partnership working for countywide delivery in 2025/26

- Working in partnership with the Environment Agency, KCC are jointly delivering property flood resilience in Westerham, Ulcombe and Headcorn which will better protect over 40 homes from internal flooding.
- KCC continues to support the Southern Water Clean Rivers and Seas Taskforce, removing surface water from the combined sewer network helping to reduce combined storm overflows and improving water quality.
- Liaison with the water companies continues to support water resilience including water audits in schools and KCC estates and installation of water saving devices.
- The Nutrient Neutrality stakeholder group was launched in 2025/26 bringing together multiple partners to address the challenges and opportunities within the Stodmarsh Catchment for tackling Nutrient Neutrality.

3.4 Goal 4 report: 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.

Key performance indicator: Percentage of local planning authority requests for advice from the Ecological Advice Service responded to within 21 days	
2024/25	2025/26
(not measured – new KPI for 2026)	

Key performance indicator: Number of trees planted	
2024/25	2025/26
149,945	11,942

Teams across KCC continue to deliver for Kent's high-quality environment and landscapes and the extensive engagement with the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy has highlighted just concerned partners, communities and residents are with protecting and recovering the natural environment.

However, this work does not come without its challenges, with the most significant being the financial resource to deliver projects. Kent Plan Tree has seen a significant 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, 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 to continue this success.

Plan Bee surveys have discovered England's rarest bumblebee, the Shrill-carder on Kent County Council managed roadside verges. At our country parks we have also found three other rare bumblebees – the Brown-banded Carder, Red-shanked Carder and Ruderal. These survey findings help to demonstrate the importance of managing our assets in a way sensitive to the wildlife they may support.

3.4.1 Key achievements in 2025/26

- 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.
- Over 7,000 responses provided on planning applications in the county, advising on flood management, biodiversity and archaeological matters.

- Plan Tree continued to expand tree cover across Kent with 11,942 new trees planted as mini forests, hedgerows, community orchards and parkland trees, including 299 Dutch Elm Disease resistant elms and 90 fruit trees.
- Kent's Plan Bee commenced surveys across the estate to better understand and improve how we support pollinators and their habitats, with 100 wildflower surveys at our Country Parks and nature reserves, 84 pollinator surveys on the road network with support from Highways teams and 6 site assessments undertaken for our household waste recycling centres
- Publication of Pollinators of Kent and the Community Pollinator Toolkit.
- Plan Bee directly engaged with 950 members of the public across 16 public events, and held 6 survey and identification training sessions.
- 1800 trees planted at Shorne Woods, as part of a wider biodiversity enhancement project on site supported by National Highways.
- With volunteer support from the Gravesham Friendly Society, carried out essential management of the veteran and ancient trees at Shorne Wood.
- Implemented a bespoke land management plan at Shaw Grange Closed Landfill site, designed to encourage biodiversity and increase social value.

In March 2026 we published our first [Kent County Council Biodiversity Duty Report](#) The biodiversity duty is a legal requirement for public authorities to actively consider, conserve, and enhance biodiversity when exercising their functions. The 2021 Environment Act strengthened this duty and required public authorities to publish a biodiversity report at the end of 2025 (and every five years). The purpose of the biodiversity report is to help everyone understand how we are collectively meeting shared goals to conserve and enhance biodiversity and showcase the action we're taking. The report essentially acts as a five year summary of what has been achieved against goal 4 of the Environment Plan and more. The report not only reflects on the past five years but also looks at the priorities for the next period.

3.4.2 Partnership working for countywide delivery in 2025/26

- The Kent Nature Partnership has been re-established to provide strategic oversight of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and champion its delivery.
- The Nature Recovery Team are working closely with partners including the National Landscape Units, South East Rivers Trust, Kent Wildlife Trust, Farm Clusters and Countryside Management Partnerships to support the development and delivery of projects (including securing funding) in line with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy priorities.

The KCC managed Countryside Management Partnerships have secured more than £1 million in external funding to deliver local action working in collaboration with a breadth of partners for nature and communities, some of this work includes:

- Supporting 62 community groups across Kent by delivering nature restoration and habitat management work with volunteers, writing plans and providing funding.
- Engaged 79 schools and colleges, reaching hundreds of young people either through environmental education during visits to the parks or outreach events at the schools.

- Created or restored 44 ponds for wildlife and completed 252 biodiversity surveys for great crested newts across 237 ponds.
- Ongoing monitoring of 75 barn owl boxes helping to conserve population numbers which had been declining due to loss of nesting sites from old buildings.
- Delivered 3,179 volunteer days to support local environments.
- Removed 1,210 bags of litter and 88 large items from rivers.
- Engaged more than 1,000 people through events, plus 218 through community talks.
- Supported 440 people through nature-based wellbeing programmes.
- Delivered 19 training sessions to develop skills such as running forest school programmes.

The Kent Downs National Landscape unit, hosted by KCC, carried out a number of projects to conserve and enhance the natural environment, including:

- The Heritage Ponds project worked with 55 volunteers, recording over 1,600 “ghost” ponds; archaeological surveys were carried out and 6 ponds restored.
- The ‘Making Trapping Happen’ project addressed the issue of the invasive Asian Hornet, setting up hubs for partners to access traps and information.
- The ‘Viticulture Health’ project investigated best practice methods of practicing viticulture for landscape and biodiversity.
- The North Kent Woods and Downs National Nature Reserve was launched, creating a network of over 800 hectares of protected sites, managed for wildlife, conservation, and people.

3.5 Goal 5 report: 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.

Key performance indicator: Municipal waste recycled, re-used and composted	
2024/25	2025/26
42%	43%

Key performance indicator: Municipal waste diverted from landfill	
2024/25	2025/26
99.2%	99.6%

Key performance indicator: Percentage of waste recycled, reused and composted at HWRCs	
2024/25	2025/26
49%	53%

Key performance indicator: Mystery Shopping at Household Waste Recycling Centre Services	
2024/25	2025/26
97%	97%

Key performance indicator: Customer satisfaction with HWRCs	
2024/25	2025/26
97%	96%

During 2025/26, the Resource Management and Circular Economy service continued to deliver strong environmental and customer outcomes, supporting Kent's transition towards a more circular economy and reinforcing its commitment to the waste hierarchy and zero-landfill approach.

Municipal recycling, reuse and composting increased from 42% to 43%, whilst waste diverted from landfill improved from 99.2% to 99.6%, demonstrating the effectiveness of Kent's waste management infrastructure and treatment arrangements. Performance at Household Waste Recycling Centres also improved significantly, with recycling, reuse and composting increasing from 49% to 53%, reflecting continued efforts to maximise resource recovery and keep materials in productive use.

Customer service standards remained exceptionally high, with mystery shopping performance maintained at 97% and resident satisfaction remaining strong at 96%, demonstrating the service's ability to deliver environmental improvements while continuing to provide a high-quality service for Kent residents.

3.5.1 Key achievements in 2025/26

- 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.
- Opened a container reuse shop at New Romney in July 2025, followed by a purpose-built reuse shop at Allington Household Waste Recycling Centre in September 2025. Combined the shops divert around 17 tonnes of reusable items from disposal each month, putting them back into use. They also generate funds to expand reuse initiatives and support Kent charities with £2,000 donated to date.
- 15 household waste recycling centres now have dedicated containers to collect reusable items for resale through the reuse shops or auction houses or donating to charities.
- The e-Waste Warriors project worked with 36 schools across 6 districts and engaged 21,324 children and their families in responsible electrical recycling messaging; and trained 3,633 students in repair skills using Team Repair kits.
- The e-Waste Warriors project collected more than 5 tonnes of e-waste for recycling and repaired 190 items (366kg of electricals), equating to £13,077 of savings for community repair café users.
- Trained 43 food, drink and horticultural businesses in sustainability and supported them with £179k of external regional funding for water, energy and resource-saving investments.
- Recycled 4,600 Christmas trees, raising £84,000 for Pilgrim's Hospice.
- Installed an improved gas extraction system at Tovil Closed Landfill site.

3.5.2 Partnership working for countywide delivery in 2025/26

In January 2025, the appointment of a new strategic lead for the Kent Resource Partnership led to a complete refresh of the partnership approach. New officer networks and delivery structures were established, including two dedicated sub-groups focused on communications and waste enforcement. Achievements of the Partnership over the past year include:

- Refresh and publication of the Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy 2026-2031, with five authorities endorsing it by March 2026.
- Specialist support was commissioned from WRAP, ReLondon and AH Knight, bringing external expertise into Kent to support evidence-based decision making and officer development on areas such as behaviour change, recycling at flats and best-practice service improvements.
- Waste composition analysis across all districts established an important baseline and showed that 37% of residual waste could still be recycled, highlighting future opportunities for improvement.
- A countywide food waste recycling project involving all ten districts with food waste collections delivered outstanding results:
 - 5,292 tonnes of additional food waste collected

- Nearly 20% increase overall in food waste recycling
 - Significant increases in participation
- The "Shake it Out" campaign was launched to encourage residents to present recycling clean, dry and loose.
- A contamination reduction pilot with Swale Borough Council began in March 2026 and reported encouraging early results.
- A dedicated communications officer was recruited through joint funding from KRP and KCC, strengthening communication capacity across the partnership.

The KRP-funded Intelligence Analyst continued to support all district and borough enforcement teams through intelligence-led working. Key outputs included:

- 448 information requests fulfilled
- 16 intelligence checks supporting multi-agency operations
- 34 intelligence reports processed and shared
- Six enforcement partnership meetings held to coordinate action against cross-border waste crime.
- Practical on-site support helped authorities assess communal recycling facilities and identify improvement opportunities.

Co-founded Circular South East, a collective of physical and digital hubs to make better use of materials and resources across the region. This includes promoting reuse, repair and remanufacturing, and developing the skills and markets needed to support the transition to a circular economy.

3.6 Goal 6 report: 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.

Key performance indicator: Annual visits across KCC country parks	
2024/25	2025/26
1.16 million	1.18 million

Kent Country Parks were 83% self-financing in 2025/26 with a record high number of visits generating income that was invested back into the maintenance and running of the Country Parks.

Shorne Woods, Lullingstone, Brockhill, Grove Ferry, Pegwell Bay and Trosley were all awarded gold in the South & Southeast in Bloom Country Park award and Grove Ferry was crowned Park of the Year by the same awards.

Key performance indicator: Explore Kent digital reach	
2024/25	2025/26
197,800 users	126,800 users

Digital Reach measures engagement with Explore Kent's digital channels, through new website users and visitors to social media profiles. In 2025/26, Explore Kent achieved a Digital Reach of 126,829, comprising 107,000 new website users, 15,100 Facebook profile visits, 4,300 Instagram profile visits and 429 LinkedIn profile visits. The reduction from 2024/25 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 increased from 7,800 in 2024/25 to 19,829 in 2025/26, representing 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.

Key performance indicator: Percentage of local planning authority requests for advice from the Heritage Service responded to within 21 days	
2024/25	2025/26
(not measured – new KPI for 2026)	

3.6.1 Key achievements in 2025/26

Promote public engagement with our unique countryside and natural beauty

- 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.
- A countywide public rights of way engagement campaign, including 8 new leisure walking guides bringing the collection to over 215 across the county and an expanded travel offer of 16 active travel guides and 10 walking and cycling itineraries.
- Over 300,000 website views, 42,000 walking and wheeling guide downloads and over 940,000 people engaged through social media.
- 1.18 million visits across the nine KCC Country Parks.
- Retention of green flags at 8 KCC Country Parks³.
- 3,051 pupils from 118 schools benefiting from outdoor learning at KCC Country Parks.
- 12,459 attendees of Kent Country Park events.
- 1,747 volunteer days and 10,485 hours of their time.
- Two new Changing Places, at Trosley and Brockhill Country parks.

Kent's historical environment is sustained for future generations

- 2,600 new records added to the Historic Environment Record.
- Major restoration completed at Meopham Windmill.
- 3,000 hours of community archaeology volunteering over the past year.
- The Hoo Peninsula project launched 4 community archaeology projects, completed LiDAR mapping across the entire peninsula, and undertook 4 archaeological surveys to help communities explore local heritage and archaeology.
- In Thanet, 9 public talks have promoted local heritage and archaeology.
- The Chilmington community heritage project has also engaged 800+ local people, helping them discover the history and heritage of the new development.
- The Bridging the North Sea project produced a resource assessment and interpretation plan to help secure our coastal Roman heritage.
- 85 cases of Treasure reported in Kent in 2025/26.

3.6.2 Partnership working for countywide delivery in 2025/26

In partnership with Mencap and Active Communities Thanet, Explore Kent pioneered new ways to make accessible routes with a co-design workshop with 7 adults with learning disabilities and a further 7 walk champions in-training.

Explore Kent's Health and Nature work is strengthening links between nature, wellbeing and communities, with the expansion of the Health and Nature Network to now 250+ partner organisations. The work has included:

³ Shorne Woods, Lullingstone, Trosley, Manor Park, Teston Bridge, Grove Ferry, Brockhill and Pegwell Bay

- Providing funding for 24 projects in the Marmot Coastal region to help residents stay both physically and mentally healthy by getting them out into nature, helping to build stewardship for the environment.
- Securing 16 places on a Level 3 nature-based practice course to upskill organisations working in this area.

The Heritage Conservation team assisted Thanet District Council to successfully protect from development the setting of St Augustine's Cross and the traditional site of the historic meeting of King Ethelbert and Augustine. Supplementary Planning Guidance for the archaeology of Dover town has been developed by KCC and Dover District Council and has now been adopted by the planning authority. The team also recorded or amended more than 2,000 cropmark features for Thanet in partnership with Historic England to help conserve Kent's rich heritage.

Kent Downs National Landscape unit, hosted by KCC, administered and supported projects worth over £775k with outcomes for people, place, climate and nature via the DEFRA Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme.

The Kent Downs National Landscape unit and Cross-Channel Geopark submitted their application to UNESCO for Global Geopark status in recognition of its internationally significant chalk geology and landscapes.

4. Action to underpin delivery against the Environment Plan goals

4.1 Increasing consideration of the environment in our decision-making

To embed KCC's Environment Plan effectively, environmental considerations need to be integrated into organisational decision-making processes. To support this objective, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EnvIA) tool pilot was launched in early 2025 to ensure that decisions not only comply with, but also actively contribute to, the delivery of KCC's environmental strategies.

The pilot was trialled across 12 diverse activities, ranging from internally focused projects to externally commissioned services. The results demonstrated the tool's ability to identify environmental risks and opportunities that may otherwise have gone unnoticed, while also embedding environmental considerations as a routine part of decision-making.

Following review of the pilot outcomes, KCC's Environment Board concluded that the concept had been successfully proven. The Board subsequently commissioned the development of a refined process, including a screening tool designed to rapidly identify and exclude activities with no material environmental impact, enabling resources to be focused where assessment adds greatest value.

Work continues to further refine and finalise the assessment approach, with the intention that it will be ready for roll out in late 2026/27.

4.2 More sustainable commissioning

KCC's Environment Plan relies on commissioning activity to drive environmental improvements while also enhancing efficiency and resilience across the supplier base. During the reporting period, progress was achieved through three key initiatives:

1. Development and pilot testing of a **Sustainability Toolkit** that integrates environmental considerations throughout the commissioning cycle, including among commissioners, procurement specialists, and contract managers. Kent's local authorities played an active role in development, collaborating on consistent sustainable procurement practices across local government.
2. Partnership working with 20 KCC commissioning teams to **strengthen the articulation of environmental requirements** within high-profile procurement specifications, ensuring suppliers are given clear expectations regarding environmental performance and outcomes.
3. Publication of KCC's first **environmental market benchmarking survey** as part of a care sector procurement. Developed and delivered in partnership with the commissioning

team, the survey provided valuable insight into supplier environmental maturity and market capability, helping to inform future procurement activity.

4.3 Increasing awareness and understanding

KCC continued to increase environmental awareness, understanding and capability across the organisation and wider county during 2025/26 through a coordinated programme of governance, communications, engagement and training activity. Through the ongoing delivery of its ISO 14001-certified Environmental Management System, environmental considerations continued to be embedded within services and decision-making processes across the council. This was supported by KCC's successful ISO 14001 recertification during the year. Work also commenced to refresh the Sustainability Leads and Environmental Champions networks, strengthening support arrangements, governance and links to the Environment Board to enhance their role in promoting environmental awareness and supporting delivery of Environment Plan objectives.

Internal communications helped improve understanding of KCC's environmental commitments, priorities and sources of support. Environmental content on KNet was reviewed and refreshed, resulting in the creation of a new *KCC and the Environment* page focused on the Environment Plan, alongside an updated *Environment and Circular Economy* page providing access to key strategies, guidance, contacts and resources.

Member and staff engagement was supported through five Environment and Circular Economy newsletters published during the year. Produced on behalf of the Cabinet Member and shared with elected members, staff and the Environmental Champions network, the newsletters raised awareness of environmental priorities, highlighted progress against the Environment Plan and supported informed decision-making. They also provided opportunities for projects and services to promote consultations, engagement activities and other calls to action to a wider audience.

Environmental literacy was further strengthened through a range of learning and development opportunities. KCC reviewed and updated its environmental training offer on Delta, including the environmental content within staff induction and the optional *Climate Change* and *Environmental Awareness* modules. This was complemented by the continued delivery of Carbon Literacy and ISEP-accredited training. During the year, KCC delivered its first Carbon Literacy course for elected members in partnership with Canterbury City Council and its first Community Leaders Carbon Literacy course through the Kent Sustainable Communities Network, helping to extend environmental knowledge beyond the council.

Partnership working also helped build environmental understanding across Kent and Medway. Through the Climate Change Network, climate and sustainability professionals from local authorities and partner organisations, including the NHS, Kent Police and Kent Fire and Rescue Service, shared learning, best practice and experience on common environmental challenges. The Kent Sustainable Communities Network launched and

similarly provided opportunities for grassroots organisations to collaborate, share knowledge and promote local environmental action.

Public awareness activity continued through the Greener Kent programme and its sister brands. Communications and campaigns focused on helping residents, businesses and communities understand practical actions they could take to support waste reduction, food waste recycling, repair, reuse, nature recovery and climate action. New communication channels, including Nextdoor, were introduced to broaden audience reach. During the year, the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy communications channels transitioned to *KCC Nature Recovery*, supporting the move from engagement and strategy development towards delivery and participation in nature recovery projects.

Environmental education remained an important part of this work through the Greener Kent Schools programme. By July 2025, 75% of participating schools had appointed a Sustainability Lead, 54% had developed or started implementing a Climate Action Plan, 172 schools had signed up to the national campaign for schools to reduce emissions and 157 schools had registered with the National Education Nature Park programme. The programme supported schools through training, resources, webinars and funded projects, including e-Waste Warriors, which helped pupils develop practical understanding of repair, reuse, recycling and circular economy principles. Following the initial delivery phase, resources continued to be made available through the Greener Kent YouTube channel, KELSI and CYPE networks.

5. Priorities for Environment Plan delivery in 2026-27

Over the coming year, the following priorities for delivery against the Environment Plan goals will be taken forward.

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Goal	Work priority
Goal 1: Deliver green energy and reduce carbon emissions.	• Continue to lead on the development of the Kent & Medway Local Area Energy Plan to align goals and priorities regarding the energy system transformation across the region, with an investment-ready portfolio of projects. • Create a detailed Solar Strategy for the KCC estate, including funding options and ways to integrate community energy models. • Improve KCC's energy performance and contribute to lowering bills by delivering energy efficiency projects such as solar PV installation and LED upgrades to KCC's estate. • Publish the Kent and Medway Homes Retrofit Action Plan and deliver actions with relevant stakeholders.
Goal 2: Adapt to our changing climate.	• Continue to carry out Climate Change Risks Assessments to identify risks, improve resilience and develop mitigations with KCC's directorates and services as part of the KCC Climate Change Action Plan. • Commence development of a Kent and Medway Adaptation Framework to inform and align climate resilience across Kent and Medway. • Strengthen the evidence base for climate vulnerability across Kent services and organisations through the Severe Weather Impacts Monitoring System. • Make water resilience a strategic priority by developing an investment plan and adaptive pathways that strengthen Kent's ability to withstand and respond to future water stress.
Goal 3: Reduce flood risk and manage water resources effectively.	• Install Property Flood Resilience on properties across Westerham, Ulcombe and Headcorn. • Deliver phase 2 of the Romney Marsh Climate Change and Flood Risk Assessment. • Deliver the flood risk and water resilience project in Dymchurch. • Work with three schools to reduce surface water flood risk and build resilience within the school site. • Invest a minimum of £2million of Local Nutrient Mitigation Funding to deliver Nutrient Neutrality. • Draft the Kent 25-year Water Strategy and undertake a public consultation, prior to adoption in early 2027/28. • Establish the Kent Water Resilience Partnership, enabling a framework for collaboration and partnership work.

Goal 4: Protect and improve the natural and built environment.	• Plant an additional 10,000 trees within Kent, focussing efforts to where planting supports habitat and species recovery. • Embed the ambitions and priorities for action of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy in work across KCC and with stakeholders. • Work with partners, stakeholders and land managers to develop projects and secure funding to deliver Local Nature Recovery Strategy measures across the county. • Draft Kent Plan Sea and undertake a public consultation, prior to adoption in early 2027. • Commence work to develop an action plan for the recovery of grassland habitats across Kent. • Actively steer the delivery of biodiversity net gain to maximise investment in locations identified by the Local Nature Recovery Strategy as areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity. • Refocus efforts of Plan Bee to support the recovery of pollinator species identified as priority for action under the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. • Deliver against Country Park management plans to maintain, protect and enhance the park's flora, fauna and habitats across 534ha. Maintain SSSIs in favourable condition and improve those sites in unfavourable condition. • Deliver year 6 of the Shorne Woods Biodiversity enhancement project. • UNESCO Global Geopark status. • Publish Kent Downs National Landscape Management Plan.
Goal 5: Manage resources through a circular economy.	• Increase food waste recycling across Kent to capture more recyclable material, reduce disposal costs and lower carbon emissions from residual waste. • Improve the quality and quantity of dry recycling, helping residents recycle more packaging materials correctly and reducing contamination. • Enhance recycling performance at flats and communal properties, targeting areas where recycling rates are traditionally lower and service improvements can deliver significant gains. • 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. • Reduce waste crime and fly-tipping through coordinated enforcement, intelligence sharing and public behaviour change campaigns. • Support waste reduction and reuse initiatives, including the launch of a community support fund focused on reducing waste and encouraging more sustainable resource use. • Drive behaviour change among residents, through targeted campaigns aimed at improving recycling, reducing littering, preventing battery fires and supporting the introduction of new recycling requirements.

Goal 6: Conserve and promote Kent's natural beauty and heritage.	<i>Promote public engagement with our unique countryside and natural beauty</i> • 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. • Strengthen and drive forward the 250+ member Health and Nature Network, using the emerging Theory of Change to co-design priorities, shape future delivery and maximise collective impact across partners. • Build local capacity to deliver health and nature interventions by securing funding for additional Nature-Based Practice training. • Increase participation in walking, wheeling, cycling and nature-based activities through a range of initiatives delivered on a full cost recovery basis. • Broaden access to the health and wellbeing benefits of nature, particularly among underrepresented groups, while increasing environmental awareness and stewardship. • Maintain 8 Green Flags and South and South East in Bloom awards across our KCC Country Parks. • 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 interpretation projects at Lullingstone, Trosley and Brockhill. <i>Kent's historical environment is sustained for future generations</i> • Introduce a cost recovery charging schedule to enable an improved response time to developer pre-application queries and the provision of advice on archaeological matters to Kent local planning authorities. • Prepare a second phase of the Bridging the North Sea project. • Deliver the community archaeology and heritage interpretation activities for the Whose Hoo landscape partnership NLHF project, with partners.
Action to underpin delivery against the Environment Plan goals	• 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.