

**To:** Environment, Highways & Waste Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 22 November 2011

**By:** Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste  
Paul Crick, Director of Planning and Environment

**Subject:** Natural Environment White Paper and development of Local Nature Partnership for Kent

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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## **Summary**

In June 2011, Defra published the Natural Environment White Paper. This launched the formation of Local Nature Partnerships, which aim to secure the wider social and economic benefits of a healthy natural environment. This paper provides an overview of the Paper's vision and the establishment of a Local Nature Partnership for Kent.

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## **Introduction to Natural Environment White Paper**

1. The Natural Environment White Paper, published by Defra at the end of June 2011, outlines the Government's vision for the natural environment over the next 50 years. It makes a bold statement that the Government wants this to be the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than it inherited.
2. Much like the Kent Environment Strategy, the White Paper recognises that a healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing.
3. The Paper aims to mainstream the value of nature across our society by a number of key reforms, namely:
  - Facilitating greater local action to protect and improve nature.
  - Creating a green economy, in which economic growth and the health of our natural resources sustain each other, and markets, business and Government better reflect the value of nature.
  - Strengthening the connections between people and nature to the benefit of both.
  - Showing leadership in the European Union and internationally, to protect and enhance natural assets globally.
4. One initiative announced by the White Paper, to facilitate the protection and improvement of nature at the local level, is the establishment of Local Nature Partnerships, which represent a more holistic view of the natural environment and recognise the wider social and economic benefits biodiversity brings.

## **Development of a Local Nature Partnership for Kent**

5. The Kent Biodiversity Partnership has recognised the value of working towards becoming a Local Nature Partnership, broadening the vision for the county's natural environment and widening the spectrum of delivery partners.

6. The Partnership has recently secured £27,000 of capacity building funding from Defra to take this work forward, which will focus on engaging additional partners and establishing a vision and set of targets for the natural environment that recognise the potential for social and economic benefits also.

7. The partnership, which already has strong engagement from the environmental sector, will be looking to secure partners from the economic and social sectors, including:

- Land owners
- Local businesses
- Local industry
- Health departments
- Education
- Local communities
- Access

8. As outlined as a requirement in the White Paper, the Partnership will also be seeking constructive and cooperative working arrangements with the Local Enterprise Partnership, to ensure opportunities for a green economy are realised.

9. Partnerships that fulfil Defra's vision will be invited to submit applications in early 2012 to be recognised by Government and its environmental agencies.

## **Link between White Paper and Kent Environment Strategy**

10. The White Paper very closely mirrors the ethos of the Kent Environment Strategy, whereby nature is valued not just for its own sake but as an asset which supports economic and social regeneration. It is encouraging that our local environmental strategic thinking is so closely aligned to that being promoted nationally and provides a good basis for taking work forward.

11. The Kent Local Nature Partnership will reflect the three cornerstones of theme 3 of the Kent Environment Strategy, *Valuing our natural, historic and living environment* – the economic value of the natural environment; the quality of life that it supports; and that the natural environment must be protected and enhanced if these services are to be realised.

12. The Partnership will therefore provide a framework for delivery of this theme and its aims and objectives, that will last (and continue to deliver) past the timeframe of the Strategy.

## **Additional comment on implications of White Paper for the County Council**

13. The White Paper does not pose any additional burdens or statutory duties on local authorities. However the Paper emphasises the need for "*greater local action*" and it is clearly stated that it is the local authorities that have the strategic overview, local knowledge

and statutory powers (e.g. through planning) required to achieve the vision set out by the White Paper.

14. Whilst recognition of the local authority role is welcomed, there is some element of concern over delivery as, other than some one-off funding for specific initiatives, there is no additional funding from central government. Currently, in Kent, over half of the districts do not have an in-house ecologist and this is unlikely to change given the current budget cuts being faced. KCC therefore has an important strategic role to ensure that the county does fully engage with, and contribute to, the vision of the White Paper.

## **Recommendations**

15. POSC is asked to:

- Comment on the development of a Local Nature Partnership for Kent.
- Comment on potential partners for the Local Nature Partnership.
- Support the establishment of a Partnership which will help the county to fully realise the economic and social benefits of a healthy natural environment.

## **References**

The Natural Choice: Securing the value of nature

<http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.pdf>

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