

From: Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste
Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 19th March 2019

Subject: Draft Kent Biodiversity Strategy

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee, 10 October 2019

Electoral Division: All – Strategy is county-wide

Summary: To provide the Cabinet Committee with an overview of the draft Kent Biodiversity Strategy, ahead of the planned public consultation in summer 2019.

Recommendation(s): The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and note the draft Kent Biodiversity Strategy.

1. Introduction

1.1 The draft Kent Biodiversity Strategy (the Strategy) sets out the contribution the county of Kent can make to the Government’s ambition to “leave our environment in a better state than we found it” and the further aspirations set out in its 25 Year Environment Plan, A Green Future (2018).

1.2 The draft Strategy is a Kent Nature Partnership document and has been prepared by Kent County Council and the Kent Wildlife Trust under the guidance of a Task and Finish Group, comprising the following members of the Kent Nature Partnership (see Appendix 1 for details on the Kent Nature Partnership):

- Environment Agency
- Kent County Council
- Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre
- Kent & Medway NHS & Social Care Partnership Trust
- Kent Wildlife Trust
- LEADER programme (rural business grants body)
- Medway Valley Countryside Partnership
- Natural England
- RSPB
- Swale Borough Council
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
- University of Greenwich

1.3 This report provides an overview of the draft Strategy and the intended future approach to finalise it for adoption. A copy of the draft Strategy is appended to this report.

2. The need for a Kent Biodiversity Strategy

2.1 Biodiversity is typically defined as the variety of plant and animal life and the interactions between them. Biodiversity does not just concern rare or endangered species and habitats, everything, even the most commonplace, has an important role in the wider ecosystem and the processes they support. The abundance of a species is also crucial in maintaining a healthy ecosystem. Biodiversity is important, not just for its own sake but because it is responsible for the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat and for materials we rely upon. It provides us with a place for recreation, reflection and interest; and, as such, is vitally important to our physical and mental health and wellbeing.

2.2 Despite this, biodiversity is facing a crisis. The 2016 State of Nature Report¹ found that the UK has lost significantly more nature over the long term than the global average, with suggestions that we are among the most nature-depleted countries in the world – over half of our species are in decline. This is therefore a pivotal point in time to take action and change the direction of travel – for both biodiversity’s sake and for the essential role it plays in our lives. With a rich and varied biodiversity resource, and committed and driven stakeholders, Kent has a key role to play in this national effort.

2.3 Kent is not immune from the pressures on biodiversity. In fact, Kent’s location both as a gateway to Europe and within the south east, means it faces significant land use pressures from infrastructure and most notably, unprecedented levels of growth. Natural environment and natural capital must be integral to, and a key consideration within, sustainable growth.

2.4 It is imperative that we all work together to meet the demands of the county whilst safeguarding the future of our wildlife and habitats. Whilst the State of Nature report may paint a bleak picture, it has also shown that when conservationists, government, business and individuals work in partnership, landscapes can be restored and threatened species saved. The Kent Biodiversity Strategy aims to help steer this collective action within the county.

2.5 The Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan, “A Green Future”, pledges that this will be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than it was found. Furthermore, that this generation will pass on to the next generation a natural environment protected and enhanced for the future. The Kent Nature Partnership supports this vision and through the Kent Biodiversity Strategy, sets out the county’s contribution to such an ambition by delivering healthy, sustainable and coherent biodiversity in Kent. As such, the targets set by this Strategy are within the context of the national 25 year goals and the policies that will deliver them. This draft Strategy replaces Kent Biodiversity 2020, an informal strategy which was based on the UK’s Biodiversity 2020 targets.

¹ The State of Nature UK reports are produced by a partnership of over 50 organisations involved in the recording, researching and conservation of nature in the UK and its Overseas Territories.

3. Kent Biodiversity Strategy's mission and goals

3.1 The Kent Biodiversity Strategy aims to deliver, over a 25-year period, the restoration and creation of habitats that are thriving with wildlife and plants, ensuring the county's terrestrial, freshwater, intertidal and marine environments regain and retain good health.

3.2 The Strategy looks to protect and recover threatened species and enhance the wildlife habitats that Kent is particularly important for. It also aims to provide a natural environment that inspires citizen engagement and is well used and appreciated, so that the mental and physical health benefits of such a connection can be realised by the people of Kent. This will be achieved through the delivery of the following goals:

3.2.1 Terrestrial habitats, ecosystems and species: *by 2044 Kent has a rich and growing terrestrial biodiversity, underpinned by more resilient and coherent ecological networks and healthy, well-functioning ecosystems.*

3.2.2 Freshwater and intertidal ecosystems and species: *by 2044 Kent has clean, productive and biologically diverse freshwater and intertidal ecosystems underpinned by implementation of a 'source-to-sea' approach.*

3.2.3 Marine habitats, ecosystems and species: *by 2044 Kent is making its contribution to reversing the loss of marine biodiversity and delivering clean, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas through good management.*

3.2.4 Connecting people with the natural environment: *by 2044 the 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.*

3.3 Under each of these goals the draft Strategy sets out specific objectives and targets for selected priority habitats and species. These can be read in detail within the draft Strategy appended to this report.

3.4 Kent is home to 36 priority habitats² and more than 85 priority species³. Whilst all remain important to the county, the Strategy has chosen to select 15 priority habitats and 8 species on which efforts should be specifically focussed and targets set. Their selection has been based on the following criteria:

- Habitats and species for which Kent is a stronghold at UK level.
- Habitats and species for which there is sufficient data/monitoring available.
- Species that can act as an indicator for the broader health of the natural environment and biodiversity.
- Species that would benefit from particular attention in Kent.
- Species which will benefit from landscape scale conservation.

² UK priority habitats were selected using one or more of the following criteria: for which the UK has international obligations; are at risk (rare or high rate of recent decline); functionally important for species inhabiting wider environments; and/or important for species of conservation concern.

³ UK species identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action.

- Opportunity for the Kent Nature Partnership to deliver gains for this target through joint working.

4. Implementation of the draft Strategy

- 4.1 Whilst the draft Strategy and its goals, have a 25-year time frame, some of the targets have a shorter time frame in line with aspirations to deliver in the short to medium term.
- 4.2 The Strategy, once finalised, will be reviewed every five years. Given the long timeframe of the Strategy and the ambitious nature of the goals, a five-year implementation plan will sit alongside it with delivery of the targets broken down into smaller, shorter actions. Monitoring and review of the strategy, based on delivery of the implementation plan, will be every two years. This implementation plan will be developed following the conclusion of the public consultation.
- 4.3 It is intended that the targets will be owned by all that have an opportunity to influence and impact biodiversity in the county – from statutory agencies to local planning authorities; land owners to non-governmental organisations; those that use the land to those that benefit from its services. All have a role to play and the Kent Nature Partnership umbrella will continue to bring these partners together to help deliver the Strategy’s aspirations for biodiversity.
- 4.4 Once finalised, Kent’s local planning authorities will be invited to adopt the Strategy. District representatives on the Strategy task and finish group have advised that individual authorities may struggle to adopt the full strategy, given that some elements (for instance marine environment or specific priority habitats) may be outside of their geographical area and influence. To address this, the Strategy will be broken down into District Specific Strategies that will identify the biodiversity value of each district and the relevant targets. Each local planning authority will then be invited to adopt a District Specific Strategy

5. Policy Framework

- 5.1 The Strategy supports the Council’s second Strategic Outcome of “*Kent communities feel the benefits of economic growth by being in-work, healthy and enjoying a good quality of life*” by helping to support:
- a physical and natural environment that is protected, enhanced and can be enjoyed;
 - a good quality of life; and
 - well planned housing growth.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed (see appendix 3). The public consultation will be designed to ensure all are able to access and influence the draft Strategy; the consultation will follow KCC’s standards for design and consultation process. Further details are outlined in paragraph 8.3.

- 6.2 The EqIA will be reviewed in light of the responses to the public consultation.
- 6.3 It is considered that the Strategy itself offers no potential for discrimination. However, it may provide the opportunity to deliver a favourable impact for all protected character groups in respect of the Strategy’s objective “By 2044 the 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”. The EqIA will be used to inform the Implementation Plan and associated actions as they are defined.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The draft Strategy places no financial obligations on KCC, with exception of the production of the consultation document. Resources for this will be met from existing revenue budgets.
- 7.2 Once adopted, the Strategy is not anticipated to place any new financial burdens on the authority in terms of its implementation. There will be resource implications in terms of development of the implementation plan, district strategies, monitoring and review; as before, these will be met from existing revenue budgets.

8. Timetable for finalisation of the draft Strategy

- 8.1 The draft Strategy is currently being reviewed by the wider Kent Nature Partnership. The next steps for finalisation of the strategy are:

Amendment & finalisation of draft Strategy for public consultation	March-May 2019
Public consultation	June/July 2019
Finalisation of Kent Biodiversity Strategy	August/September 2019
KCC adoption of Kent Biodiversity Strategy via Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee	October 2019
KNP partner adoption of Kent Biodiversity Strategy	October 2019 onwards
Development of KBS implementation plan	September 2019 onwards
District synopsis development	September 2019 onwards

- 8.2 The public consultation scheduled for summer will give members of the public and other stakeholders the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Strategy before it is finalised and adopted. The consultation also provides the opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity.
- 8.3 The public consultation will be designed by KCC’s Engagement and Consultation team and will take into account consultee accessibility requirements as identified by the Equality Impact Assessment. It is anticipated that the consultation will be online, with responses submitted digitally via an online response form. Notwithstanding, to ensure accessibility the consultation documentation is expected to include:

- a word version with text describing images, tables etc to improve accessibility for people using audio transcription software.
- hard copies available at Country Parks, Libraries and Gateways and on request.
- details of how people can request the consultation documents in alternative formats, such a large print.

8.4 The consultation will be widely promoted via KCC and Kent Nature Partnership communication channels; KNP partners will also be asked to help promote the consultation.

9. Recommendation(s)

Recommendation(s): The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and note the draft Kent Biodiversity Strategy.

10. Background Documents

Previous Kent Biodiversity Strategy -

<http://www.kentnature.org.uk/uploads/files/Nat-Env/Kent-Biodiversity-Strategy-final.pdf>

A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment -

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf

2016 State of Nature Report -

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-projects/state-of-nature/state-of-nature-uk-report-2016.pdf>

11. Contact details

Report Author

Elizabeth Milne, Natural Environment & Coast Manager

03000 413950

elizabeth.milne@kent.gov.uk

Relevant Director

Stephanie Holt-Castle, Interim Director for Environment, Planning and Enforcement

03000 412064

stephanie.Holt-Castle@kent.gov.uk