

From: Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Susan Carey, Cabinet Member for Environment

Decision No: 20/00025

Subject: Kent County Council adoption of Kent Nature Partnership Biodiversity Strategy 2020-2045

Classification: Unrestricted

Electoral Division: All – Strategy is county-wide

Summary: The Kent Nature Partnership Biodiversity 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 wider ambitions within the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (2018). The Strategy steers the collective action of partners in Kent so that the county's natural landscape can be restored, and threatened species can be saved. Adoption of the Strategy by Kent County Council will demonstrate the authority's commitment to our environment. This report summarises the Strategy in order to seek endorsement for its adoption by Kent County Council.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Member for Environment is asked to formally adopt the Kent Nature Partnership Biodiversity Strategy 2020-2045.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Kent Nature Partnership 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). A copy of the Strategy can be found in Appendix 2.
- 1.2 The Strategy was prepared for the Kent Nature Partnership by Kent County Council and the Kent Wildlife Trust under the guidance of a Task and Finish Group, comprising members of the Kent Nature Partnership (see Appendix 3 for details on the Kent Nature Partnership). Following stakeholder engagement and a formal consultation in 2019, the Strategy was approved by the Kent Nature Partnership Board on 28th February 2020. It is now with the Kent Nature Partnership's partners for adoption or endorsement.
- 1.3 This paper provides an outline of the Kent Biodiversity Strategy and seeks an endorsement from the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee for the Strategy's adoption by the Cabinet Member for Environment.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 It is not anticipated that the Strategy itself will place any new financial burdens on the authority in terms of its implementation. Rather it will influence the way

we deliver our services and capital works, the policies we develop and the planning decisions we take. Potentially it may also inform resources and environmental investment in the future.

- 2.2 There will be some resource implications for the authority in 2020 because KCC will be preparing, on behalf of the Kent Nature Partnership, the Strategy's implementation plan and spatial summaries of the Strategy for each of the districts. In future years, KCC will also be responsible for the monitoring and review of the Strategy. For more detail on this work, see paragraphs 4.15-4.18. These resources will be met from existing revenue budgets already established to enable KCC to support the Kent Nature Partnership.

3. Policy Framework

- 3.1 The Strategy supports the Council's 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. The Strategy will also contribute to a good quality of life and will help inform well planned housing growth.
- 3.2 The Strategy will support the County Council's new Five-Year Plan, in particular the Cleaner and Greener Kent outcome. It will also support the associated ambition that "Kent's residents can take pride in their public space. The natural environment that makes Kent so special is protected and we are leading climate action."

4. The Kent Biodiversity Strategy

The importance of biodiversity

- 4.1 Kent has a wonderfully rich and varied biodiversity, with globally rare habitats such as the vegetated shingle of Dungeness, our ancient chalk grasslands and the marine chalk reef habitats around the coast. This varied habitat supports over 3,400 rare and threatened species, with some of these only found in Kent within the UK. But it's not just the rare or endangered that matter – all our biodiversity has an important role in the natural environment and the services it provides.
- 4.2 Biodiversity is essential to our lives. It is responsible for the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soil we live on and the food we eat. It provides us with clothes, building materials and medicines. And it provides us with a place for leisure, recreation and reflection and is a key enabler of good mental health and wellbeing.
- 4.3 Many animal and plant species are in decline with some in danger of extinction. Across the UK, 133 species have already been lost. Kent too faces challenges to protect its natural assets.

The Strategy and its preparation

- 4.4 The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, A Green Future (2018) pledges that this will be the first generation to leave the environment in a

better state than we found it and 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 this by delivering healthy, sustainable and coherent biodiversity in Kent.

4.5 The 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:

- 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

4.6 The Strategy has previously been considered by Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on March 19th 2019 prior to its public consultation in summer 2019. There were 144 responses to the public consultation. The majority of responses were from individuals but some local authorities, parish councils and other organisations did submit comments. The consultation indicated that the Strategy was responding to the correct drivers and challenges. The majority of responses agreed with the Strategy's 25-year mission and four goals (87% and 92% respectively). As a result of the consultation the Strategy's objectives were strengthened, with a particular focus on the marine environment and connecting people better with nature, with more long term and robust objectives included. Additional priority habitats and species were also included.

4.7 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed (see appendix 4). 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 characteristic 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.

4.8 The Kent Biodiversity Strategy was approved by the Kent Nature Partnership Board on 28th February 2020.

The Strategy's mission, goals and objectives

4.9 The Strategy aims to deliver, over a 25-year period, the maintenance, 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. It 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.

4.10 These aims will be achieved through the delivery of the following goals in Kent for 2045:

- A rich and growing terrestrial biodiversity, underpinned by more resilient and coherent ecological networks and healthy, well-functioning ecosystems.
- Clean, plentiful and biologically diverse freshwater and intertidal ecosystems underpinned by implementation of a catchment-based approach.
- A reverse in the loss of marine biodiversity and delivering clean, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas through good management.
- 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.

4.11 Action is steered by a broad spectrum of ambitious objectives. The Strategy also takes into account overarching considerations affecting biodiversity recovery including wilding, climate change, natural solutions, soil health and invasive species.

4.12 Kent is home to 36 priority habitats and many more priority species¹. Whilst all remain important to the county, the Strategy has chosen to select 17 priority habitats and 14 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.
- Opportunity for the Kent Nature Partnership to deliver gains for this target through joint working.

4.13 The specific detail of the objectives and priority habitat and species targets can be read in detail within the Strategy in Appendix 2.

¹ 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. UK priority species area identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action.

4.14 Delivery of the Strategy will be within the framework of available resources. There is uncertainty over the Environmental Land Management Strategy and other sources of finance, now that the UK has left the EU. Some opportunity for investment may be generated by Biodiversity Net Gain tariffs and other natural capital investment and by the development of green investment bonds. As such, the Strategy's ambitions have been considered alongside a pragmatic need to deliver real impact. More impact could be made with greater resources and these will continue to be sought; therefore, the objectives and targets of the Strategy should be seen as realistic ambition upon which the Partnership hopes to outperform.

Implementation, measuring progress and review

4.15 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 that will progress action towards the 25-year vision. Monitoring of the Strategy's progress, based on delivery of the implementation plan, will be every two years.

4.16 Environmental policy, and the wider political context in which it is being developed, is currently very dynamic. Whilst the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan gives us some idea of the ambition and direction of travel, national targets and the mechanisms by which they will be delivered are still in development. The Strategy will need to be able to respond and adapt as more detail, policy and legislation is formalised and therefore the Strategy will initially be reviewed within 2-3 years. The Strategy will then be reviewed every five years (unless other external factors dictate earlier is required).

Adoption

4.17 It is intended that the Strategy and its objectives and 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 and parish councils; 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 brings these players together to help deliver the Strategy's aspirations for biodiversity.

4.18 In particular, the Kent Nature Partnership will work with the county's local planning authorities so that the Strategy's ambitions can be embedded in, and delivered through, Local Plans. To assist with this, district specific strategies will be developed over the coming year so that each planning authority can focus their efforts where they will have the greatest impact. This will help ensure that Kent's Local Plans appropriately consider, protect and enhance Kent's valuable natural capital resource and the services it provides.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The Kent Biodiversity Strategy has been through a rigorous process of development that has resulted in a framework for collective action so that the county's natural landscape can be restored, and threatened species can be saved.

5.2 Kent County Council's adoption of the Strategy will demonstrate the authority's commitment to responding to Government's ambition to "leave our environment in a better state than we found it."

6. Recommendation(s)

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Member for Environment is asked to formally adopt the Kent Nature Partnership Biodiversity Strategy 2020-2045.

7. Background Documents

- 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
- WWF Living Planet Report 2018 https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/wwfintl_livingplanet_full.pdf
- Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment#_By_the_Numbers
- State of Nature 2019 <https://nbn.org.uk/stateofnature2019/reports/>

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