

From: Robert Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment
Simon Jones, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Cabinet - 28 November 2024

Subject: Adoption of the Kent County Council Environment Plan

Key decision: 24/00094

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of report: **Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 14 November 2024**

Future Pathway of report: **Cabinet Member Decision**

Electoral Division: **All**

Summary: The KCC Environment Plan is a comprehensive plan designed to unify and enhance the organisation's environmental and sustainability efforts. By embedding these goals across all areas of work, the plan aims to support environmental, growth, and health outcomes without imposing additional financial burdens. The Environment Plan has been developed with significant input divisions across KCC that have shaped the aim, objectives and actions that define the Environment Plan. Actions listed in the plan have corresponding target outcomes which will be reported on annually at Environment and Transport Committee to ensure that progress is monitored and maintained.

Recommendation(s): Cabinet is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Environment on the proposed decision to:

- To adopt the Kent Environment Plan on behalf of Kent County Council.
- To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment to refresh and/or make revisions to the Strategy as appropriate during the lifetime of the strategy.
- To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport to take relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of, and entering into required contract or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision as shown at Appendix A.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Kent boasts a rich, diverse and unique natural environment that benefits the health and well-being of Kent residents and is crucial for sustainable economic and social growth.

- 1.2 The Kent environment is facing unprecedented challenges. Climate change, habitat and biodiversity loss, flooding and sea level rises, invasive species and pollutants contaminating our natural and marine ecosystems, air and water quality problems and resource depletion are all issues affecting the county.
- 1.3 The UK government has responded to environmental challenges by implementing several key policies and pieces of legislation including the 25-Year Environment Plan, the Environment Act 2021, the 2023 Green Finance Strategy and the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023.
- 1.4 The pace of legislative change has accelerated and KCC has responded by developing its own knowledge, strategies and action plans in response to the increase in duties and responsibilities required of the Authority.
- 1.5 The development of policy and strategy has resulted in an explosion of environmental activity that is delivering significant outcomes for and within Kent. However, this activity is, by design, often focused on a specific policy or target and does not benefit from a holistic approach.
- 1.6 Financial challenges including the withdrawal of both EU and UK government funding and the financial pressures on the Authority have reduced the ability to progress environmental activity at the pace and scale currently needed to deliver required outcomes.
- 1.7 Kent County Council's Environment Plan outlines KCC's role in delivering the national agenda locally and focuses on a holistic approach that delivers maximum benefits. The Environment Plan does not seek to replace previous strategies and policies but acts as an umbrella plan to provide clarity of priorities and action and enabling progress to be made most efficiently and effectively.
- 1.8 The Environment Plan recognises the interconnected principles of Environment, Growth and Health supporting mutual progress and providing significant co-benefits without requiring fundamental changes to current or future work.

2. Overview of the Kent County Council Environment Plan

- 2.1 The 25-Year Environment Plan, introduced in 2018, emphasises the natural environment as a vital inheritance to be protected and enhanced for future generations. It outlines ten long-term goals, including cleaner air and water, thriving plants and animals and a greener country for everyone. By fostering better connections to nature, the plan aims to make this generation the first to leave the environment in a better state than it was found, ensuring a protected and enhanced natural environment for the future.
- 2.2 The Environment Act 2021 is a landmark piece of legislation aimed at improving environmental protection in the UK. It sets legally binding targets to enhance air and water quality, tackle waste, increase recycling, halt species decline and improve the natural environment. The Act imposes greater duties on local authorities, including developing Local Nature Recovery Strategies, conserving biodiversity, reforming waste services, reducing pollution and ensuring

community involvement in green space decisions. It works alongside existing policies to enhance their impact.

- 2.3 The 2023 Green Finance Strategy, titled “Mobilising Green Investment,” aims to position the UK as a global leader in green finance. It focuses on enhancing the growth and competitiveness of UK financial services, mobilising private sector investment in the green economy, integrating climate and environmental risks into financial decision-making, incorporating nature and biodiversity into financial strategies and aligning financial flows with the UK’s climate and nature goals. This strategy supports the transition to a sustainable economy and reinforces the UK’s commitment to addressing climate change and environmental sustainability.
- 2.4 The Environmental Improvement Plan 2023, the first revision of the 25-Year Environment Plan, outlines how the government will collaborate with landowners, communities, and businesses to achieve environmental goals. It focuses on ten key areas: thriving plants and wildlife, clean air, clean and plentiful water, managing exposure to chemicals, maximising resources while minimising waste, sustainable use of natural resources, climate change mitigation and adaptation, reducing environmental hazards, enhancing biosecurity and improving the beauty and engagement with the natural environment. The plan sets ambitious targets to improve air quality, ensure clean water, halt biodiversity decline, and enhance resource efficiency and waste reduction, aiming for a sustainable and prosperous future.
- 2.5 The aim of the KCC Environment Plan is to safeguard and improve our environment, supporting healthy communities and sustainable growth. This mirrors the governments approach to consider environment not as a solo discipline but one embedded within health and growth to ensure long-term sustainability.
- 2.6 The Environment Plan aims to deliver on the following objectives to work towards the overarching aim:
 - 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
 - Adapt to a 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
 - 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.
 - Protect and improve the natural and built environment: drive nature protection and recovery across the county, ensure that our habitats are abundant with wildlife and plants and drive environmentally sustainable development
 - Manage resources through a circular economy: manage materials more efficiently by minimising wates and reusing and recycling materials, enabling the development of a circular economy in Kent

- 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
- 2.7 Actions to meet each objective are set out in Section 6 of the Environment Plan. An annual monitoring report of the plan will be provided that will outline planned activity for each year and show progress made against each action ensuring that the plan remains live and fit for purpose over time.
- 2.8 The actions that support the delivery of the objectives will be reviewed as part of the annual report.
- 2.9 The adoption of the Environment Plan supports the national delivery of environmental outcomes. It also meets outcomes of Priority 3 of Framing Kent's Future 2022-2026, 'Environmental Step Change', which seeks to reach our Net Zero targets, protect and strengthen our natural environment, work with our partners towards Kent being Net Zero by 2050, explore options for carbon zero energy production and use and ensure that the county is well placed to adapt to climate change.

3 Financial Implications

- 3.1 KCC's Environment Plan has been developed by base funded staff from the Environment and Circular Economy Division, and at no additional cost to the council. Staff time will be the main resource required to deliver the objectives and actions that are set out in this plan and will be undertaken by base funded staff from all services involved. The objectives and actions are predominantly focused on capacity building through upskilling and knowledge transfer, as well as practical support and collaboration to embed the goals across the organisation and take into account relevant spending controls including Securing Kent's Future.
- 3.2 Actions that self-impose a duty to consider environmental impacts will be undertaken on a no regret basis where it is possible to do so at net cost to the council.
- 3.3 Opportunities to invest further in environmental outcomes may be developed as a result of activity relating to the delivery of the action plan. Requests for further funding will be considered after the development of robust business cases. Where match funding or in-kind funding may be required, it will be assessed on a project-by-project basis.
- 3.4 Financing options underpinned by KCC's emerging green finance strategy will provide an alternative route to funding for environmental outcomes. This will be crucial in funding environmental interventions moving forward, as current budgets are highly unlikely to be able to fund the measures that are needed to meet the scale of the environmental challenge faced by KCC, unless there are significant changes to how local government is funded.

4 Equalities implications

- 4.1 An EqIA has been undertaken and concluded that there are no positive or adverse implications to any groups with protected characteristics as a result of this plan and that the plan complies with the Equality Duty 2010.

5 Other corporate implications

- 5.1 Relevant services within the council will need to consider the Environment Plan in relation to their operations as they are already required to do. Delivering the Environment Plan will require organisation wide support to ensure that actions and activity in all areas of the business are considered alongside the sustainability requirements of the Environment Plan in order that outcomes and co-benefits are maximised, and duplication of effort minimised. There are no expectations for any additional spending.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 The KCC Environment Plan is a comprehensive plan designed to unify and enhance the organisation's environmental and sustainability efforts. By embedding these goals across all areas of work, the plan aims to support environmental, growth, and health outcomes without imposing additional financial burdens. Internal stakeholders have been consulted during the development of the Environment Plan and amendments have been made accordingly. It is considered that the Environment Plan can be adopted at no additional financial burden to the council.

7 Recommendation(s):

Cabinet is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Environment on the proposed decision to:

- To adopt the Kent Environment Plan on behalf of Kent County Council.
- To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment to refresh and/or make revisions to the Strategy as appropriate during the lifetime of the strategy.
- To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport to take relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of, and entering into required contract or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision as shown at Appendix A.

8 Appendices and Background Documents

Appendix A: Proposed Record of Decision

Appendix 1 : KCC Environment Plan v5

Appendix 2: Environmental Achievements 2023-24

Appendix 3: Governance Structure for the Environment Plan

Appendix 4: Equality Impact Assessment

9 Contact details

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