

**From:** Susan Carey, Cabinet Member for Environment  
Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport

**To:** Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee - 12 November 2020

**Subject:** Kent's Plan Bee

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of report:** n/a

**Future Pathway of report:** n/a

**Electoral Division:** All – countywide

**Summary:** This is a report on how Kent County Council is acting to reverse the decline of pollinators by delivering Kent's Plan Bee.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report on progress in delivering Kent's Plan Bee.

## **1. Background to Kent's Plan Bee**

- 1.1 Kent's pollinator action plan, Kent's Plan Bee, was developed by a Member led group and subsequently adopted by Kent County Council (KCC) in July 2019.
- 1.2 The plan complements the National Pollinator Strategy for England 2014-2024 and meets calls from many for local authorities to use their regulatory powers and other functions to deliver, inform and encourage work that will benefit pollinators.
- 1.3 Pollinators are essential, with many plants relying on the pollinating action of insects. It has been calculated that one of every three mouthfuls of food we eat depends on pollinators and their annual benefit to the British economy is valued at £691 million (Living with Environmental Change, 2014).
- 1.4 Despite their importance, pollinators are in serious decline. Habitat loss, pesticides and climate change have resulted in:
  - Half of the UK's 27 bumblebee species in decline.
  - Three of the UK's bumblebee species already extinct.
  - Across Europe, 38% of bee and hoverfly species in decline.
  - Two-thirds of the UK's moths in long term decline.
  - 71% of the UK's butterflies in decline.

1.5 Kent's Plan Bee details how the County Council will take the lead in Kent to slow and reverse the decline of the county's pollinators. The purpose of Plan Bee is to:

- a) Establish the County Council as a community leader in the action for pollinators.
- b) Ensure that pollinators' needs are always considered throughout the County Council's work and services.
- c) Put the conservation of pollinators and their habitats at the heart of the County Council's land management and planning.
- d) Make KCC a significant contributor to the recovery of pollinator populations, which will in turn will benefit biodiversity and the economies reliant on pollination.

1.6 KCC will deliver these outcomes by working towards the following objectives:

- a) Manage the land it owns or controls or can influence in a way which can benefit pollinators' forage and habitat.
- b) Use the planning system to protect pollinators and improve the habitats on which they rely.
- c) Deliver an information campaign to encourage and enable the Kent population to take action themselves.

1.7 The plan is overseen by a cross party member working group, which meets every two months.

1.8 This summer the Natural Environment and Coast Team (within the Environment, Planning and Enforcement Division) employed a dedicated officer, on a 12-month secondment from Kent Wildlife Trust, to help put Kent's Plan Bee into action.

## **2. Kent's Plan Bee 12-month work programme**

2.1 A 12-month work programme for Kent's Plan Bee was approved by the Member working group in August 2020 (see Appendix 1 for the detailed work programme). The seconded officer's work will consequently largely fall into three areas:

- 1) Working with KCC services.
- 2) Working externally with district councils and other partners.
- 3) Communicating with residents, businesses and organisations across the county.

2.2 Plan Bee's dedicated officer will work with highways, Public Rights of Way and the KCC estate to identify opportunities to change grass cutting regimes and improve the wider estate management for the benefit of pollinators. The work includes identifying barriers to implementing such opportunities and recommending how to deal with these, based on experience and expert advice. The officer will also review the pesticides used on the KCC estate and identify how they can be further minimised or removed. The officer will support KCC services in implementing recommendations, including providing training and written guidance.

- 2.3 Working with colleagues across the districts, the officer will consider and advise on how the planning system can be used to protect and improve pollinators' habitats.
- 2.4 Work with the districts will also include using KCC's action plan to formulate a blueprint for local pollinator action plans, that Kent's districts will be encouraged and supported to adapt and adopt for their own application. At this early stage of the work, Canterbury City Council and Medway Council have expressed an interest in working with KCC on this and essentially piloting the blueprint before it is promoted to the other Kent authorities.
- 2.5 Central to the work will be mobilising the residents of Kent. A communications calendar has been developed and is designed to link into existing campaigns and promotions, to raise awareness and provide advice and guidance on what residents can do in their everyday lives to protect and help pollinators.
- 2.6 KCC's commitment to Kent's pollinators is being marked by a virtual summit on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020<sup>1</sup>. The programme will promote Kent's Plan Bee and the council's actions so far and look at what landowners and residents can do as part of this collective action. The summit is open to all and has received great interest, with more than 200 people registered to date including districts and parishes; beekeepers; farmers and land owners; environment and conservation projects, organisations and agencies; private companies; and interested individuals.
- 2.7 The County Council will host a rolling programme of summits under the Kent Plan Bee banner to support the campaign.

### **3. KCC's action to date**

- 3.1 There is considerable goodwill towards Kent's Plan Bee across KCC and there are many existing projects on which to build, such as the Roadside Nature Reserves and KCC's Country Parks existing site management plans.
- 3.2 Since the adoption of Kent's Plan Bee in 2019, KCC's Highways Soft Landscape Team has taken several actions to improve pollinators' habitats, including:
  - A 3-year trial (commenced in 2019) to examine the improvement to pollinator habitat by delaying the summer swathe cut to Autumn for approximately 65km of roads on New Romney Marsh. This trial is being delivered in partnership with Bumble Bee Conservation Trust and Folkestone & Hythe District Council.
  - Two Bumble Bee Conservation Trust training sessions for highways officers.
  - Publication of guidance for all highway teams and officers for the protection of Roadside Nature Reserves (RNR) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) when they plan highway works.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/kents-plan-bee-virtual-summit-2020-tickets-123471523651>

- Continued working with Kent Wildlife Trust for RNR, including: provision of more RNR Officer time; a highways asset and habitat audit of all RNRs and SSSIs to assess current condition and opportunities for improvements for biodiversity; and the development of a new shared internet-based mapping tool of RNR for use by the public to find out biodiversity and access information on RNR.
- Working with Kent Wildlife Trust and KCC's Old Chalk New Downs project, planting 170m of pollinator friendly hedgerow on an RNR, which includes a 2-year trial of a new type of bio-degradable hedge guard which is made of natural materials. This is funded by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant.
- Working with a number of district, town, and parish councils and community groups to change some urban highway grass verges to wildflower pollinator verges; and to develop guidance about potential sites for wildflower pollinator verges.
- Kent Highways have sourced a 'bee friendly' bus shelter with a sedum roof and has helped fund the first for Kent at Higham. Work is now under way with Fastrack to identify opportunities for wildflower sites on the dedicated bus routes and the installation of Eco Bus Shelters on Fastrack BRT in Ebbsfleet, Dartford and Gravesham.
- Working with the Interreg Grassification project, which aims to investigate the benefits of collecting green waste from verge cutting and how it can be sustainably used for energy, compost, novel products and improve biodiversity on a roadside verge.
- Working with highways inspectors to identify areas that could be managed differently under the rural swathe cut.
- Identifying suppliers of wildflower seed suitable for highway verges.

3.3 All of these actions have been achieved within the existing Highways' budget.

3.4 Further to this, work to benefit pollinators within the Country Parks estate is long established and remains embedded in the work on these sites. Likewise, it is standard for wildflower mixes to be sown wherever path margins are being repaired along public rights of way, if there is room to do so.

3.5 With the support of the Kent's Plan Bee dedicated officer these actions will be built on over the coming year(s). Plan Bee will also benefit from our wider work on natural capital, where the authority is assessing how the protection, restoration and creation of natural solutions to mitigate and adapt to climate change can also be used to support biodiversity and promote multiple benefits.

#### **4. Policy framework**

4.1 Kent's Plan Bee supports the County 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:

- Kent business growth (much of Kent's agriculture, fruit farming especially, relies on pollinators).
- A physical and natural environment that is protected, enhanced, and can be enjoyed.
- A good quality of life.

4.2 The Plan also supports the Kent Environment Strategy priority of “conserve and enhance the quality and supply of the county of Kent’s natural and historical resources and assets”.

## **5. Financial implications**

5.1 Kent’s Plan Bee sets out the County Council’s intentions for how services and functions can be delivered for the benefit of pollinators. It is recognised that any changes must not place undue or new financial burdens on the authority.

5.2 Resources required for delivery of the work programme largely relate to staff time and these are already identified within existing revenue budgets.

## **6. Legal implications**

6.1 No legal implications relating to this work programme have been identified.

## **7. Equalities implications**

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was completed for Kent’s Plan Bee and was published at the time of the decision to adopt the Plan.

7.2 This identified that there will be limited negative impact from the Pollinator Action Plan and these impacts can be reduced or avoided all together with appropriate management.

## **8. Other corporate implications**

8.1 No other corporate implications have been identified.

## **9. Recommendation(s):**

The Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report on progress in delivering Kent’s Plan Bee.

## **10. Background Documents**

Kent’s Plan Bee

[https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/103905/Kents-Plan-Bee.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/103905/Kents-Plan-Bee.pdf)

National pollinator strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-pollinator-strategy-for-bees-and-other-pollinators-in-england>

Helping pollinators locally: developing a local pollinator action plan or strategy (Buglife and FoE guide)

<https://www.buglife.org.uk/sites/default/files/Helping%20Pollinators%20Locally.pdf>

## 11. Contact details

Report Author: Elizabeth Milne

Natural Environment & Coast Manager

03000 413950

[elizabeth.milne@kent.gov.uk](mailto: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](mailto:stephanie.Holt-Castle@kent.gov.uk)