

Maidstone Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy: Action Plan.



July 2017

Introduction:

Maidstone Borough Council adopted its Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy in June 2016. The strategy formed an integral part of the evidence base for the Maidstone Borough Local Plan which was examined in the latter part of 2016.

During its preparation the council engaged with a large number of stakeholder and interest groups, most recently during 2015, through focussed workshops that aimed to understand key concerns and suggestions for ways to conserve and enhance green and blue infrastructure in the borough.

Stakeholders comprised neighbouring local authorities, Kent County Council and Parish Councils, residents groups, wildlife and countryside groups, those connected to parks and urban green spaces, 'Friends' groups and sporting representatives, sustainable transport organisations and those with an interest in rivers and waterbodies including statutory authorities.

This Action Plan seeks to capture the thinking and ideas from these workshops and present these as deliverable projects within the key themes identified in the adopted strategy. Each project has an identified delivery lead; sources of funding are not identified for each specific project but could encompass external grant funding applications, developer contributions, Community Infrastructure Levy receipts or other local funding initiatives brought forward through neighbourhood plans or fundraising drives. Projects are identified as being: Delivery of a strategy (**S**); A physical project (**P**); A communication project (**C**); or other projects (**O**).

The council acknowledges that it cannot take forward every identified project in the action plan, and that many are identified for others to deliver. The council will work with partners to influence where it can, the delivery of these actions by the appropriate agencies. It should be noted that specific projects directly related to Maidstone Borough Council owned parks and open spaces are not included in this action plan as they are already part of the MBC 10-year Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

In some instances there is scope for the identified projects to be taken on by Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Forums as part of the production and delivery of Neighbourhood Plans for their respective areas. Neighbourhood Plans offer communities a positive opportunity to shape their local area through land use policies and through the allocation of projects to deliver local improvements.

The projects identified in the action plan will take time to deliver; some may be underway already, but others may be dependent on external factors and may be more long-term in their delivery.

THEME 1: Mitigating and adapting to climate change

Item no:	Type of action:	Action:	Delivery lead:
1	P	Promote and seek resources to fund the establishment of new 'fine landscape trees' and restocking and connection of woodlands in response to losses through deer and disease and to adapt to climate change.	AONB Unit/ CMPS partnership project/ Woodland Trust/ TCV ancient Tree project
2	P	Encourage tree planting as part of new development to enhance air quality.	MBC planning
3	P	Implement location specific actions with Maidstone Stage 1 Surface water Management Plan.	KCC
4	C	Raise public awareness of the importance of permeable front gardens with planting to reduce flood risk, improve biodiversity and enhance landscape character.	MBC, EA, KCC
5	O	Assess the impact of climate change on River Basin Management Planning in the borough and make the information publicly available.	EA
6	C	Key partners to liaise regarding opportunities for surface water management through green infrastructure projects.	KCC, EA, MBC, Southern water, Upper Medway IDB

THEME 2: Integrating sustainable movement and access for all

Item no:	Type of action:	Action:	Delivery lead:
1	P	Proactively seek opportunities to improve the accessibility of the footpath network in areas of demand following consultation with local communities, landowners and parishes.	KCC PROW and access service
2	C	KCC to empower local communities with information so they can prioritise resources on routes important to them.	KCC PROW and access service
3	P	Continue to improve equestrian infrastructure and develop new routes in target areas identified by riders focusing on areas of deficiency such as the south of the borough.	KCC PROW and access service, local landowners, Toll Rides (Off Road) Trust (T.R.O.T.)
4	P	Support delivery of green and blue infrastructure improvements relating to the actions in the Walking and Cycling Strategy 2016.	KCC PROW and access service; MBC planning
5	P	Improve the standard of PROW furniture through the provision of quality materials and better design.	KCC PROW and access service
6	P	Develop traffic-free walking and cycling facilities along green corridors, specifically to support school travel plans, and the Healthy Schools initiative.	KCC PROW and access service
7	P	Continue work to establish high quality car free access to the Kent Downs from Maidstone, focusing on the river valleys.	AONB Unit

Item no:	Type of action:	Action:	Delivery lead:
8	C	Advocate the importance of high quality maintenance of Public Rights of Way in the AONB – as a fundamental premise for enjoyment and access.	AONB Unit
9	P	Protect the few surviving 'green lanes' (roads which have never been paved) and byways (similar routes managed as public rights of way); promote their use by pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians; and prevent damage by motorised vehicles.	KCC PROW and access service
10	P	Rationalise and improve wayfinding and information signage in Maidstone town to encourage use of green corridors.	MBC Economic Development team
11	S	Coordinate green and blue infrastructure proposals for Maidstone with KCC Active Travel Strategy developed during 2016.	MBC planning, KCC Highways

THEME 3: Promoting a distinctive townscape and landscape

Item no:	Type of action:	Action:	Delivery lead:
1	P	Identify, manage or restore and where appropriate create viewpoints. Contact community and partner groups to identify viewpoints focusing on North Downs Way Corridor land ownership and select 1 project each year.	AONB Unit
2	P	Target Capstone - Bredhurst area of priority in the Kent Downs AONB for the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.	AONB Unit
3	P	Promote the geodiversity of the Kent Downs – to support wider landscape character objectives. Consider GeoPark status for AONB drawing on best practice in other EU Geoparks.	AONB Unit
4	P	Prioritise North Downs Way in working with partners to coordinate interpretive provision.	AONB Unit
5	S	Update tranquillity mapping for the Kent Downs AONB.	AONB Unit
6	S	Identify visual detractors from the landscape within the Kent Downs AONB and seek resources for their removal or mitigation.	AONB Unit
7	S	Work with Heritage partners to scope an innovative AONB wide project to better understand the historic heritage of the AONB and update the Historic Landscape Character Assessment.	AONB Unit
8	S	Scope need, opportunity and cost to carry forward GI planning at AONB level in partnership with LPAs/ context of NPPF.	AONB Unit

Item no:	Type of action:	Action:	Delivery lead:
9	S	Maintain stellar shape of urban area, prevent coalescence of neighbourhoods and provide network of multifunctional green infrastructure including the creation of green links from the town centre into the countryside.	MBC planning
10	P	Encourage creation of new apple and cherry orchards and nut plats along transport routes within specific geographical areas such as the Low Weald and Greensand Ridge to help restore local landscape character.	AONB unit, landowners, DEFRA
11	O	Identify sites to address quantified shortage of public open spaces.	MBC planning
12	O	Avoid the loss of ancient woodland and veteran trees and encourage landowners to manage and restore these areas.	MBC planning
13	P	Targeted planting of hedgerows to link habitats and counter habitat fragmentation especially Medway and Len River Valleys, dip slope of Kent Downs AONB and Greensand Ridge.	MVCP, KWT, AONB unit, TCV
14	P	Continue to support management of wildflower meadows and grassland through the Save Our Magnificent Meadows project and prioritise the Low Weald and urban areas.	MVCP

THEME 4: Maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, water and air quality

Item no:	Type of action:	Action:	Delivery lead:
1	C	Work in partnership to achieve catchment sensitive farming and raise awareness of its benefits to minimise soil erosion and diffuse pollution.	Natural England
2	P	Improve quality and accessibility of Medway riverside and encourage fishing.	EA
3	P	Draft and implement River Teise Catchment Improvement Plan to improve the quality of the water environment through partnership working.	Kent High Weald Partnership, EA
4	P	Continue invasive non-native plant species (INNS) control and management programme across the Medway catchment.	MVCP
5	P	Implement the Middle Medway Catchment Improvement Plan which includes the Len, Loose, Ditton, Leybourne streams.	Middle Medway Catchment Improvement Group, MVCP, EA
6	P	Implement the Beult Catchment Improvement Plan.	Beult Catchment Improvement Group, MVCP, EA
7	O	Protect the spring line along the southern edge of the Kent Downs AONB from pollution particularly from highway and agricultural run-off.	EA, MBC planning
8	P	Implement the River Basin Management Plans (RMBP) cycle 2 2015-2021, identify and share priority Water Framework Directive actions as identified in the RMBP 2.	Catchment Improvement Groups

Item no:	Type of action:	Action:	Delivery lead:
9	C	Share Water Framework Directive monitoring results and investigations with partners to support the catchment based approach and enable partnership actions to solve identified issues.	EA
10	S	Prevent condition of water bodies getting worse and if this does occur, develop a plan of action to reverse the decline.	EA
11	S	Prioritise Drinking Water Protected Areas to protect and improve and develop action plans to deliver this.	EA, Water Companies
12	C	Improve understanding of Water Framework Directive role in delivering planning and land management to ensure any future developments take account of Water Framework Directive and that no option should cause deterioration of a waterbody.	EA
13	O	Investigate the use of river citizen science projects to engage the community in monitoring and caring for catchments.	Catchment Improvement Groups, EA
14	O	Enhance key partnerships across government, community and the private sector. Continued support of Catchment Partnership Groups.	Catchment Improvement Groups, EA
15	S	Review and update the Maidstone Local Biodiversity Action Plan.	MBC planning
16	S	Identify habitat creation opportunity sites based on landscape scale habitat suitability assessments including for amphibian and reptile species identified by KRAG.	MVCP, KWT
17	P	Focus landscape and biodiversity improvements in the Bredhurst Dry Valleys area in the North Downs and the Laddingford Low Weald area in the south west of the borough.	KWT

Item no:	Type of action:	Action:	Delivery lead:
18	P	Continue to resource and extend the Kent and Medway Road Verge Project and manage roadside nature reserves to promote biodiversity.	Kent Highways, KWT
19	S	Develop strategy for improving biodiversity of school grounds.	KCC Education
20	P	Partner with national and regional projects to enhance biodiversity – for instance 'operation turtle dove', EU LIFE and living landscapes, RSPB biomass project.	AONB Unit
21	P	Seek to improve the River Len Local Nature Reserve Habitat Management Plan.	MBC
22	P	Increase reed beds for nitrate removal and provide phosphate removal in the River Len (designated as 'Bad' quality under the Water Framework Directive) as a whole river project to prevent nutrient enrichment across the catchment and enhance alder carr and other vegetation along the corridor of the river. Action to include increasing reed beds at Harrietsham and Lenham sewage works and providing landscaping which is attractive to birds.	Southern water

THEME 5: Providing opportunities for sport, recreation, quiet enjoyment and health

Item no:	Type of action:	Action:	Delivery lead:
1	P	Improve the quality of publicly accessible parks and green spaces with the aim of achieving 'good' standard in accordance with the quality audit 2014 and redesign where needed to address gaps in provision. Achieve Green Flag Awards in key sites to demonstrate quality and motivate volunteers.	MBC
2	P	Explore options to improve quality of existing pitches in poor condition or with a lack of facilities using Kent FA's Pitch Improvement programme.	MBC, Kent FA, IoG
3	S	Develop a playing pitch strategy to understand quantity, quality and accessibility of sports pitches and identify surpluses and deficits linking with Kent Football Association Strategy, working with National Governing Bodies of Sport to understand recreational space/pitch needs as part of new development using Kent FA pitch calculator.	MBC Planning
4	P	Provide new or improved sports pitch facilities as set out in the Maidstone Borough Local Plan.	MBC Planning
5	P	Explore provision of new allotment sites as set out in the Maidstone Borough Local Plan.	MBC Planning, Allotments Associations
6	O	Seek to secure community access to school playing fields prioritising areas where there is a shortfall in public playing fields.	MBC/KCC
7	S	Develop parks and green space visitor management strategies and link to destination management plan.	MBC Economic Development Team
8	P	Develop and promote a selection of challenging off-road cycling trails in the hillier parts of the borough.	KCC PROW and access service

Item no:	Type of action:	Action:	Delivery lead:
9	0	Explore the potential to set up a green gym in the borough.	TCV

THEME 6: Retaining and enhancing a quality environment for investment and through development

Item no:	Type of action:	Action:	Delivery lead:
1	C	Involve local communities in significant projects to improve green spaces by direct contact, meetings with representatives and use of the media and carry out consultation before site management plans are written and set up Friends of parks groups.	MBC, Parish Councils, TCV
2	C	Support improvement of publicity about sites such as parks and gardens, with better leaflets, events, website coverage and other promotional material and regularly inform the media of important issues relating to green spaces.	Explore Kent, Kent Nature Partnership
3	C	Provide schools with education packs to encourage them to use open spaces for education.	MVCP, TCV
4	O	Investigate opportunities to designate more sites as local nature reserves to help meet the Natural England standard of 1ha local nature reserve per 1,000 population.	MBC planning

THEME 7: Providing community involvement and opportunities for education

Item no:	Type of action:	Action:	Delivery lead:
1	S	Develop a detailed green infrastructure implementation plan for Maidstone town centre to guide developers and land managers.	MBC Economic Development team
2		Create substantial new areas of publicly accessible natural and semi-natural area in association with new housing development including within the north west and south east strategic development locations in Maidstone town and rural service centres in accordance with the Maidstone Borough Local Plan.	MBC Planning
3	P	Engage with businesses, local authorities and the forestry/ woodland sector to ensure the sustainable management of woodland in the Kent Downs and Greensand Ridge – beyond minimum standards and develop the potential for sustainable woodland management through fencing and building material and biomass through the Kent Pathfinder Project.	AONB Unit