



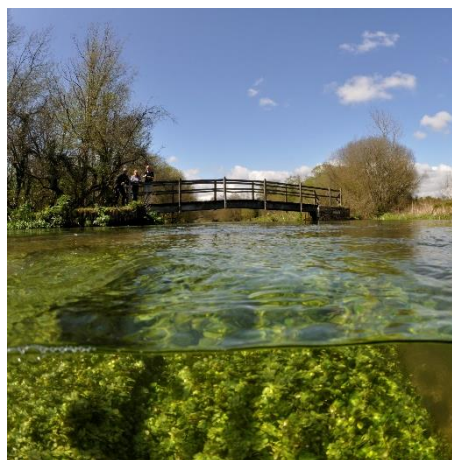
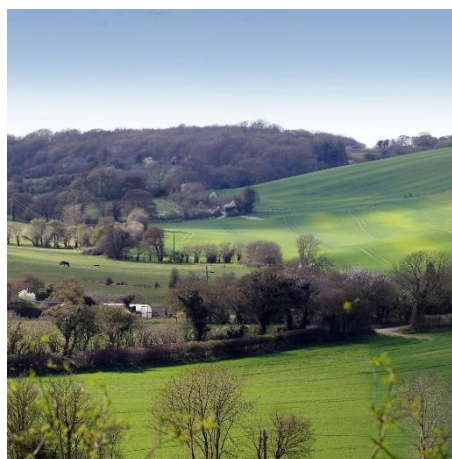
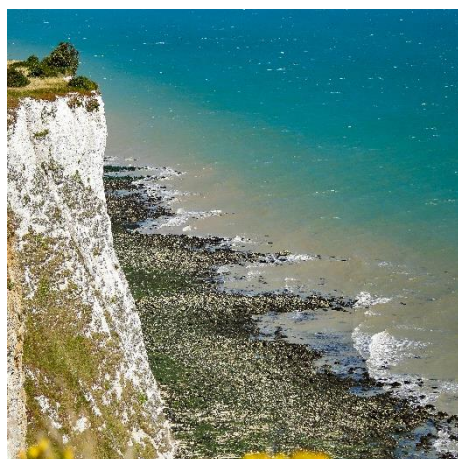
Making Space for Nature in Kent and Medway

Developing the County's Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Kent & Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy Priorities and Potential Measures

First draft June 2024

Summary of priorities



Photos © Jim Higham

Introduction

Making Space for Nature in Kent and Medway

Making Space for Nature is working with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively develop the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Kent & Medway (LNRS). These strategies result from the 2021 Environment Act, with 48 to be created across England with no gaps or overlaps. Developed at a landscape scale by the Responsible Authority (with Kent County Council taking on this role for Kent and Medway), the LNRS will agree and map the local priorities and associated actions for nature recovery and wider environmental benefits, that collectively will deliver a nature recovery network for England, ending the decline of nature and supporting its recovery.

Making Space for Nature will develop:

- Spatially framed strategy for nature – focussing action to where its most needed and/or where it will deliver the greatest benefits.
- Framework for joined-up action, developed with those that will be instrumental in its delivery.
- Set of agreed priorities for nature recovery, with measures to deliver.
- Shared vision for nature recovery and the use of nature-based solutions in Kent and Medway.
- Ambitious but realistic and deliverable plan, linked to supporting mechanisms and finance.

More detail on the project can be found on the [Making Space for Nature website](#).

How we developed the LNRS Priorities

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) will set out the priorities, in terms of habitats and species, for recovering or enhancing biodiversity and consider the contribution that this may also make to addressing wider environmental issues with nature-based solutions. In addition to identifying the county's priorities for nature recovery and enhancement, the project will also define the potential practical actions necessary to progress towards achievement of the priorities.

This is an important stage of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy preparation, as it establishes what the strategy is seeking to achieve, and the potential measures needed to support the ambitions. Meaningful stakeholder engagement at this stage of the project was key - the stakeholders will be the delivery partners for the Strategy's priorities and actions. The project also wanted to ensure that the priorities reflect what's most important to the people and organisations in Kent – to ensure it really is a LOCAL Nature Recovery Strategy, reflecting our local nature and environmental needs.

Identifying pressures and priorities for nature recovery in Kent

At the end of January and throughout February 2024, a series of workshops were held across the county to identify with stakeholders the pressures facing nature and the priorities that needed to be the focus of action to tackle these pressures and recover nature.

These five workshops were attended by a total over 200 people, representing 137 different organisations, bodies, businesses, affiliations etc. All sectors identified as relevant to the development of the LNRS were represented at the workshop, with exception of the health sector - the project has subsequently followed up with this stakeholder grouping.

Input to this initial stage was also achieved via online surveys and self-led workshops, using a toolkit provided by the project.

The outputs of this stakeholder input were:

- Pressures, threats and challenges for Kent and Medway's nature - those identified at the workshop were reviewed to determine which were in scope for the LNRS to address or influence and then edited into a list to be used in the priorities shortlisting process. The list also served as a check towards the end of the priorities development work to ensure all pressures were being addressed. The pressures collated with also be used to inform the strategy area description.
- Priorities for Kent and Medway's nature - over 800 priorities that stakeholders identified they would like to see for the county. These formed the starting foundation of the LNRS priorities development.

These 800 priorities were then taken through a refinement process to create the draft LNRS priorities shortlist:

1. Creation of priority long list by deduplicating the 800 priorities identified by stakeholders.
2. Shortlisting step 1 – excluding any priorities that were not within the statutory scope of the LNRS to address. Specific species removed and “parked” for consideration by dedicated work stream on priority species.
3. Shortlisting step 2 – assessment of remaining long list of priorities against [qualifying criteria](#):
 - a. Significance of the habitat or species in a local or national context.
 - b. Contribution to National Environmental Objectives and Environmental Targets Regulations 2023.
 - c. Contribution to the purposes of Kent’s national landscapes of Kent Downs and High Weald.
 - d. Extent to which priority needs immediate attention.
 - e. Vulnerability to climate change impacts.
 - f. Opportunity for other biodiversity and environmental benefits.
4. Further review and refinement (amalgamating/combining priorities where relevant) and checking against pressures to ensure all had been addressed.

This process was undertaken under the steer of the MS4N Delivery Group, and the resulting 69 draft priorities were signed off by the MS4N Board in April 2024 and published. The full report [Creating the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy draft priorities shortlist](#) can be viewed online.

Priorities for Kent's species

There are no species priorities within this document because priority species for the LNRS will be identified through a dedicated work package, following guidance from Natural England. Once the dedicated species prioritisation work has concluded, the species priorities identified by stakeholders throughout the various workshops will be reviewed. Any not already picked up will be considered by the Species Recovery Technical Advisory Group. More information on the [species prioritisation work](#) can be found online.

Refining the LNRS priorities

In May, three workshops were held across the county to define, refine and, where possible, shortlist further the LNRS priorities with stakeholders. 82 stakeholders, representing 54 different organisations, bodies, businesses, affiliations etc, and covering all relevant sectors, attended and considered:

- Does the LNRS suitably cover all habitats that are a priority for action in the county?
- Does the priority shortlist sufficiently address the pressures faced by nature in the county?
- Are any additional priorities required?
- Are any of the priorities unrealistic or unachievable?
- Is there anything considered not a priority?

The general consensus of the workshops was that the draft priority shortlist addressed the needs of nature and its recovery in Kent and Medway, sufficiently tackling the pressures within its scope and ability to do so. It was acknowledged that the shortlist was still rather long and would benefit from further refinement – however stakeholders struggled to identify which of the priorities could be taken out. Some specific amendments and suggestions restructuring were arrived at. This included the creation of a top level of priorities, focussing on broad habitat types or areas of priority.

Next steps

Mapping of the actions will be the final stage of the LNRS work to be completed - identifying the "areas that could become of importance for biodiversity". These draft opportunity areas for nature recovery will be published in September and reviewed with stakeholders in our final set of LNRS development workshops.

Any comments or queries relating to this document should be sent to makingspacefornature@kent.gov.uk

Kent and Medway's hierarchy and broad approach for nature recovery

The following priorities, sub-priorities and measures should all be read within the context of the overarching approach for nature recovery in Kent and Medway.



Firstly, recovery of nature begins with **better protection** of what we already have – there is little point in creating new habitats when we are losing from the existing baseline; we need to be seeing a gain not a maintenance.



Secondly, we need to make sure our existing habitats are in a healthy and functioning state, with appropriate management, where necessary, in place. So the next priority is **restore**. If we are not able to keep existing habitats healthy, increasing the extent will only increase the burden.

It is recognised that we need to find a more efficient system of resourcing the maintenance of our natural environment – and it is hoped that the LNRS will go some way to providing a framework for that.

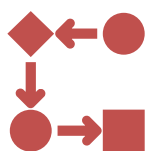


Alongside the need to restore is the need to **enhance** our existing habitats, improving their ecological function(s).



And then we can **create**. Creation may in fact be a way of protecting (buffering) or enhancing (extending); so one effort is not necessarily exclusive of another.

Whether explicitly stated or not, this hierarchy is applied across all the habitat priorities.



In the face of a changing climate we also need to consider **resilience and adaptation**, ensuring that our habitats and species have the ability and space to respond to the impacts of climate change. And that we're also being realistic with the ambitions we have for nature recovery.



We also need to maximise the benefits of our nature recovery by looking for opportunities to also use natural processes (**nature based solutions**) to tackle some of the socio-economic challenges our county faces.

Kent and Medway's Priorities for Nature Recovery



Grasslands - Retain the existing extent and connect and extend the county's grasslands. Return appropriate management that takes account of the needs of the priority species that both contribute to, and depend on, grasslands and maximises the important roles these habitats play in carbon storage, water management and soil health. Deliver high quality grassland habitats that are species-rich dynamic, natural, intact and climate resilient.



Successional habitats – Protection from loss and damage of open mosaic habitats found on previously developed land and low level scrub, providing the structural diversity for the benefit of species which rely on the early successional habitats.



Woodland, trees and hedgerows – Protection of the existing extent, and an increase in, Kent and Medway's native woodland, trees and hedgerows, which is well connected and supports a diverse ecology. A focus on embedding appropriate active management for our woodlands, so that our existing resource is in a good state, with robust ground flora and soil structures. A mixture of natural regeneration and new establishment means a greater contribution to net zero targets and delivery of the many other nature based solutions provided by functioning woodlands and trees.



Coast – Coastal and estuarine habitats are allowed evolve, with natural dynamic processes and progression restored, to enable adaption and resilience to climate change and minimise loss. Sustainable management supporting a range of high functioning coastal habitats, delivered strategically, so that trade offs in succession from one coastal habitat to another are considered in a holistic manner.



Freshwater – Kent's freshwater habitats are clean, sufficient and stable, in a healthy and good ecological state, supporting the restoration of, and an increase in, freshwater species abundance and diversity. Management works with nature to restore catchments' functions and deliver a connected mosaic of wet habitats across the landscape, which help to improve water quality and manage flood risk.



Urban – Ensure that nature is not forgotten in the urban environment, with blue and green spaces and trees providing habitat for wildlife and these areas also delivering other services through nature based solutions.



Connectivity – Habitats are connected at both a county and local scale, delivering bigger, better, more and joined up with no important species populations left completely isolated.



Climate change resilience – Increase the resilience of Kent and Medway's biodiversity to climate change, giving it the space and connectivity that enables dynamic habitats and species' adaptation.



Nature based solutions – Maximise the potential of Kent and Medway's nature based solutions.



Land management and land use – Land management and land use throughout Kent and Medway not only meets the economic and social needs of the county, but also deliver nature recovery gains.



Species – All management of Kent's priority habitats taking account of the needs of the priority species that both contribute to, and depend on, that particular habitat. With management utilising the role of species to help deliver more dynamic, natural, intact and climate resilient ecosystems.

Kent and Medway's priority outcomes for nature

LNRS Under each of the priorities for Kent and Medway's nature recovery the LNRS aims to deliver the following outcomes, identified as sub-priorities.

Grasslands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chalk grasslands are protected from land use changes and other threats, restored to a better and species-rich condition, and connected and buffered across the landscape to promote ecological integrity and resilience, particularly for the purpose of facilitating species movements in response to climate change. - Existing coastal and floodplain grazing marsh restored to better condition and retaining more freshwater, with sensitive areas and the breeding waders they support protected from land management and recreational disturbance. Opportunities taken to create and extend areas of this habitat and increase its climate resilience. - Existing species-rich lowland meadow is protected from loss, restored to better condition and extended through sensitive land management practices to reduce soil nutrient levels. Through the extension of lowland meadow, this habitat is better connected, reducing the risk of isolated meadow species and declines in species richness. - Retain, restore and extend the county's acid grassland and heathland habitat mosaics, to improve the species diversity these limited habitats in Kent and Medway support. - Protect, restore and increase fields with a diversity and abundance of arable weeds and wildflowers.
Successional habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protection from loss and damage of open mosaic habitats found on previously developed land for the benefit of species which rely on the early successional habitats. - Protect and increase the extent of low level, scrub/successional habitat, providing a mix of young and mature scrub to enable structural diversity and the support of a wide range of species. Link this scrub habitat with hedgerows, woodland and other habitats to support wildlife corridors.

Woodland, trees & hedgerows

- Retain the extent, and improve the condition, of **existing woodland and trees outside woodland** through active management, improving habitat provision for woodland species.
- Increase the **average canopy cover** of Kent through woodland and trees outside woodland to 19%.
- Return the ecological function provided by **native trees** previously prolific in Kent, by restoring those lost to disease, pests, climate change and drought (including poplar, ash and elm).
- Ensure the **resilience** of the county's woodlands.
- **Ancient woodland, and ancient and veteran trees**, are protected from loss, with damaged areas restored through natural processes, management and the removal of invasive and problematic non-native trees and plants. Areas of ancient woodland are buffered and better connected.
- Increase the extent of high quality **wet woodland** in the county and improve connectivity with the freshwater habitat network.
- Retain and protect the High Weald's unique **ghyll woodland** and the plant species they support and the important functions they provide for the wider river catchment.
- The extent of **species-rich hedgerows** throughout the county is increased, with lost hedgerows replaced, gaps filled and management of existing hedgerows improving the quality as well as quantity. Hedgerows providing a coherent network of shelter, nesting and forage for wildlife across the landscape and allowing other habitats to be linked.
- An increase in **traditional orchards**, under sensitive management, supporting an abundance and diversity of wildlife.
- Appropriate **deer and grey squirrel management** in woodland and connecting areas, to reduce impacts and support new planting and natural regeneration.

Coastal

- Sustainable and strategic management of **estuaries and open coast** to create functionally linked coastal habitats that are allowed to evolve, creating areas for wildlife to thrive. Natural dynamic processes and progression is restored, to enable adaptation and resilience to climate change and minimise the loss of intertidal habitats.
- Reduce small scale loss, increase connectivity and improve the condition of **saltmarsh and mudflats**, with functioning ecosystems supporting foraging, roosting and nesting birds and fish nurseries.
- Reverse the decline in **seagrass** off Kent's coast to protect this important habitat for marine species and their breeding grounds and nurseries; and to preserve its vital function as a blue carbon store.
- **Chalk reefs** nurtured and protected from erosion and damage.
- Sustainable management of **native oyster beds** to allow them to reach their habitat building potential.
- **Saline lagoons** are appropriately protected and managed to increase their resilience and adaptation to climate change and secure their ecological functions, including the role they will play as transitional habitats.
- Protect and restore **vegetated shingle**, ensuring there is no unavoidable loss and areas remain in, or are returned to, a favourable condition.
- Reduction in **marine life disturbance** resulting from leisure pressures at coast.

Freshwater

- All **rivers and associated catchments** achieve good ecological status or potential, with more naturally functioning rivers, free from physical modifications and artificial barriers, which are able to move dynamically and have diverse habitats, flows and channel shapes. Rivers are connected with their floodplain and a mosaic of wet habitats.
- Establish wide, more **natural buffer strips with a diverse vegetation structure along rivers, streams and springs**, providing a balance of light and shade, managed through a combination of natural processes and catchment support, supporting wetland habitats and protection from pollution.
- Protect **headwater streams** and restore a natural channel shape, allowing them to function as part of a mosaic of seasonally wet habitats including grasslands and woodlands, providing resilient flows to rivers and supporting a wide range of wildlife.
- **Chalk streams** reach good ecological status and provide high quality river habitat, with natural and uninterrupted flows along their permanent course and well managed ephemeral headwater streams. Chalk streams are protected from pollution, with a more natural channel shape, to support characteristic flora and fauna. The quality and quantity of groundwater on which chalk streams rely is protected.
- Restore **clay rivers** to a more natural channel shape, removing physical modifications and the impacts of historic alterations and restoring a mosaic of connected wetland habitats along the floodplain and headwater streams.
- Restore **ponds** with high ecological value or potential and creation of new ponds especially as part of a mosaic of habitats. Protect all ponds habitats from run-off pollutants and invasive species, while allowing successional habitats to develop where appropriate.
- Improve the health of **groundwater bodies** by protecting them from pollution and over-abstraction, in turn protecting and supporting groundwater-dependent terrestrial and wetland ecosystems.
- Restoration of **lowland mire sites** (fen and raised bog), with the provision of buffers to allow the habitat extent to increase.
- Increase the extent of high quality **reedbeds** across Kent and ensure existing reedbeds are in appropriate management.
- Work with nature to restore **river catchments' functions** to improve water quality, manage flood risk and deliver enhanced biodiversity.
- Protect and restore wildlife-rich and functioning **freshwater wetlands** across the county, providing not only shelter, nurseries and breeding grounds but also carbon sinks and water management.

Urban

- Address **habitat fragmentation** of the urban environment, ensuring urban species can freely move about and developed areas and infrastructure does not impede passage.
- Urban **public greenspace and land management** delivering wildlife benefits.
- Protect and increase the extent of **green space, trees and hedgerows** within urban areas to not only provide more habitat for wildlife but also deliver other benefits including urban cooling, air and noise pollution regulation and surface water management.

Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - County's key wildlife sites better connected by addressing the fragmentation and barriers preventing movement of species. - Fragmentation caused by arterial roads, railway and other major infrastructure retrospectively addressed, reconnecting habitats and wildlife pathways. - Habitats connected at both a county and local scale, delivering bigger, better, more and joined up with no important wildlife habitats, or species populations, left completely isolated. - Management of habitats and wilding approaches to deliver a connected mosaic of habitats at a large scale, where nature can flourish and species requirements are considered.
Climate change resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve connectivity of the landscape, with dynamic habitats which evolve and change, to support climate change resilience, with particular attention paid to <<habitats>> and <<species assemblages>>. - Proactively address the migration of new species into the county as a result of a changing climate, with strategies for both naturalised species and invasive/pests. - Landscape scale management, with partners beyond the county, to address habitat change and species migration as a result of climate change.
Nature based solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase the extent of carbon sequestering habitats in the county, which are purposefully managed to function as a carbon store whilst prioritising a nature recovery function. - Protect habitats delivering critical ecosystem services in the county. - Improve soil health and structure by enhanced and increased soil management so that it is better delivering for invertebrates, carbon sequestration, water retention and management and production/provisioning.
Land management & land use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in number of farms employing nature friendly farming practices and sensitive land management, resulting in farmland across the county that is rich in wildlife. - Farmland delivering targeted action for nature recovery. - Farmland responding to climate change induced pressures with the help of nature. - Protect freshwater habitats and groundwater bodies in farmland from agricultural diffuse pollution (caused for example by soil, nutrient or livestock management practices and physical modifications) and the impacts of over-abstraction. - Publicly accessible open spaces managed for both wildlife and people.