Making Space for Nature in Kent and Medway
Developing the County's Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Health & Access Workshop Report
10th July 2024

Shorne Woods Country Park

Introduction to Making Space for Nature in Kent and Medway

Making Space for Nature (MS4N) 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](#).

MS4N workshops – pressures, priorities and measures

The LNRS will be for everyone and MS4N is engaging many people in its development. In February, our first series of workshops focused on the pressures on the natural environment and the priorities needed to address these pressures.

Our second series of workshops in May, sense checked the shortlisted priorities and arrived at potential measures that will deliver them.

The draft Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy Priorities and Potential Measures has now been published and can be viewed [here](#).

In September, mapping workshops will look at how some of these measures can be located and mapped across Kent and Medway, while remaining measures will be picked up in the finalised LNRS which will go out for public consultation in the early new year.

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Health and Access workshop

Across the February and May workshops, connection with nature along with the health benefits of accessible natural green space were often raised, but the LNRS regulations require us to have a habitat focus for priorities and measures, so at those workshops we were unable to properly examine how heath and access might be reflected in the LNRS.

It was decided therefore that a specific Health and Access workshop was needed to be held by the MS4N project achieve the following aims: -

- To understand respective priorities in relation to health and access and bring partners working in these areas into the project and encourage joint working.

- To capture health & access priorities for the LNRS to support.

- To get input on spatial datasets that can be used to pinpoint where action is needed.

To achieve these aims the event was split between informative presentations and workshop sessions where the room was divided into four facilitated tables and two sessions, aimed at providing input on the following two questions:

- What are the main health priorities that the LNRS can support.
- What are the main access priorities that the LNRS can support.

Attendance

The workshop was promoted to various networks such as the Green Social Prescribing Network and Kent Countryside Access Forum and representatives from a wide range of health and access organisations attended.

The following people presented: -

Chris Drake, Making Space for Nature (MS4N) Project Officer

Katie Pattison, Making Space for Nature Local Government Officer

Paul Clarke, Public Health Specialist, Kent County Council

Sirina Blankson, Head of Sustainability & Environment, K&M NHS & Social Care Partnership

Graham Rusling, Head of Public Rights of Way, Kent County Council

Hayley Dillon, Senior Officer, Connecting people with Nature, Natural England

Joshua Stroud, Kent Public Health Observatory

Jane Houghton, Senior Officer – Strategy, Connecting People and Nature Team

Key points from presentations – PowerPoint can also be found [here](#).

Green Infrastructure

Katie Pattison Local Government Officer from the MS4N project compiled a document for the workshop featuring spatial green infrastructure strategies across Kent and Medway, focusing in on the health and access elements.

These were mainly produced by district and borough councils, newer strategies from 2020 onwards generally have more ambition and actions – but MS4N don't have information on the degree to which these have been delivered.

All however are linked to nature Improvement and access, so it will be important to see how these are carried forward, what other strategies and plans they are integrated into and how the LNRS can support Green and Blue Infrastructure delivery.

Integrated Care Strategy

Paul Clark, Public Health Specialist at Kent County Council covered the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Strategy (ICS) and the ICS partnership, which is made up of all who pay for health & care systems in Kent and Medway.

A key point was that clinical care is only responsible for 20% of health outcomes, whereas health behaviours, social economic factors and the built environment are responsible for the other 80% of health outcomes.

The evidence on the health benefits (physical, mental and wider) of access to good quality green spaces is strong, so nature is a vital part of those wider heath determinates.

It is also often deprived communities that have low access to green spaces and nature.

Kent and Medway NHS & Social Care Partnership Trust

Sirina Blankson from the Kent and Medway NHS & Social Care Partnership Trust covered their Green Plan, which includes a "Green Space and biodiversity Project plan" to meet the Trust's objective of having safe, accessible, sensory spaces which have a positive impact on recovery and overall patient and staff experience.

She went on to describe the work at Coleman House, Dover – which is putting this into effect and includes meadow and garden management.

A review of natural green space by the Trust has taken place, but a fuller mapping of green capital needed alongwith more resources, as funding for nature improvements is through grants and partnership schemes.

Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

Graham Rusling provided an overview of KCC's Public Rights of Way & Access Service, which he manages. The PRoW network in Kent extends to 6900Km and provides unparalleled access to Kent's countryside and coast.

In terms of access to nature and greenspace he cited the example of the King Charles III England Coast Path and coastal access margin which passes through some of the communities with the poorest health outcomes including multiple indices of deprivation.

However, in general 1 in 3 don't have access to nature within 15 minutes, it's important that accessible green space is close to people.

He recognised that PRoW are also often nature rich corridors or could be. They are highways first – and must be passible – but work for nature at the margins / boundaries is possible.

The Rights of Way of Way Improvement Plan runs to 2028 and includes good design, as well as access from new housing and development.

15 minute commitment

Hayley Dillon, Senior Officer, Connecting People with Nature at Natural England highlighted the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 commitment "to ensure that anyone can reach green or blue space within 15 minutes from their front door" Population changes mean more houses and increasing demand to access nature close to where people live.

Urban accreditation is coming in for places that put nature at the heart of communities to grow health, prosperity, connection and resilience.

A baseline is being developed to identify the percentage of households with blue and green space national to local, so this should be a useful resource.

In terms of LNRS she said that recovering or enhancing biodiversity does not just benefit the natural environment and responsible authorities such as KCC may also shape potential measures so that they will deliver non-environmental (societal) co-benefits.

Kent Public Health Observatory

Joshua Stroud from [Kent Public Health Observatory](#) highlighted the wealth of health and access data that is available to us to determine areas of the county that could benefit most from the LNRS in terms of nature close to people.

Public Health Surveillance includes monitoring information on population demographics, socio-economic factors, health-related behaviours and environmental factors.

Index of multiple deprivation scores across Kent and Medway are useful, alongside the detail on physical inactivity, long terms illness, child poverty, age and disability.

Super output areas – defined by number of people in an area are a good framework for analysis.

This can be all brought down to district level, but less information is available the closer you focus in on a geographical area.

Most of this data is available to anyone who needs it, to understand the population and to design appropriate interventions.

Green Infrastructure Framework for England

Jane Houghton, Senior Officer – Strategy, Connecting People and Nature Team at Natural England, highlighted the [Green Infrastructure Framework for England](#).

This aims to Improve existing and create more good quality green infrastructure and support Local Authorities in their refresh of local plans.

She referred to Green Infrastructure Standards and Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide which NE are working with planners, developers and neighbourhood planners to be widely applied in their work.

Alongside the 15-minute commitment, Jane highlighted the target of at least 3 hectares per 1000 population of publicly accessible greenspace, plus the Urban Greening Factor Standard - at least 40% average green cover in urban residential neighbourhoods.

She went on to highlight NE GI mapping, which shows where GIS is, the gaps, how green is your neighbourhood and who lives within 1km of good quality green space.

Jane concluded by recommending use of the Strategy Standard and the other Headline Standards as the starting point for developing local GI Policies Local Plans and said that these standards can give developers certainty over the GI and the benefits needed in a development i.e. include site-specific GI requirements in site allocation policies.

Other recommendations made in Jane's presentation –

On large developments e.g urban extensions - think about the means for delivering and maintaining the GI – so that maintenance is considered and embedded from the outset. Engage with developers at an early stage continue to engage. Benefits of having a masterplan - use it to justify the GI that's proposed for the development. And if the GI has been looked at in the EIP and then assessed as viable at EIP, it can ensure that viability issues won't become a barrier at a later stage.

Workshop conclusions - from review of presentations, discussions and workshop input (verbatim input provided at the end of this report)

The wider benefits of a functioning natural environment include health, but people need nature close to them and it needs to be accessible, physically and psychologically.

Connection with nature and health and wellbeing benefits can be realised, when habitats are improved, increased, added to or joined up close to populations lacking in natural greenspace, but people also need access to these areas, so public rights of way are key.

For some communities and individuals, the barrier to getting into nature is also psychological, so education, awareness and tools such as green social prescribing are important.

Various frameworks, strategies, plans and initiatives are delivering or aiming to inform delivery of accessible natural greenspace, but it would seem that more integration is needed, particularity across health and access priorities.

The LNRS is a new part of this jigsaw and has the potential to bring nature closer to populations that need it, but this will depend on where measures are delivered, what data is used to inform the LNRS and how well it integrates on health and access with Local Plans, GI and other strategies.

The national strategies, targets, tools and resources described in the presentations are important in terms of setting the level of ambition and informing decisions, but it is probably at the local level where health and access needs can be most usefully determined.

Local plans, GI strategies and neighbourhood plans all provide the opportunity for the detailed focus that is needed in terms of identifying needs (utilising national, but particularly local data) and then delivering on green space and access requirements.

Although the LNRS has a role to play here, this largely must be a consideration for local authorities and health and access practitioners within Kent and Medway, but the workshop seemed to throw up the following questions: -

- How are local health data sets being used to determine access needs in local plans, GI strategies, neighbourhood plans and the Rights of Way of Way Improvement Plan?
- To what degree is accessible natural green space being delivered because of these plans and strategies? Are there gaps in integration and delivery?
- Is the NHS & Social Care Partnership Trust Green Plan and Kent and Medway Integrated Care Strategy informing Green & Blue Infrastructure Plans and Local Plans and the Rights of Way of Way Improvement Plan?
- How are decisions around new and existing public rights of way being made alongside other strategies and plans, to ensure nature is accessible to people?

The above might be questions for groups such as the Green Social Prescribing Network to explore, as they bring different sectors together.

All the GI strategies reviewed by MS4N, link to nature improvement and access, so it will be important to see how these are carried forward, what other strategies and plans they are integrated into and how the LNRS can support Green and Blue Infrastructure delivery.

The LNRS will work in part through local plans, so measures and wider benefits supporting access and health in the LNRS need to be embedded in local plans (and vice versa), but fuller integration between local plans, health and green infrastructure strategies also needs to be made.

The presentations at the workshop showed that a range of strategies and plans are focused on accessible green space for health, but the degree to which this is being delivered on the ground for the populations that are set to benefit most, is unclear.

Overall, with all these areas of policy including LNRS, there is a great potential to deliver accessible natural green space in areas of deprivation, where it will most benefit people,

but more joined up working and integration between strategies and plans might be needed to fully realise this opportunity.

This is not a role for the MS4N project, but the 10 July workshop did provide an opportunity to bring together health and access practitioners, some of whom had not met each other before, to explore these areas.

There are useful partnerships in Kent and Medway, where these agendas overlap, such as the Kent Countryside Access Forum and Green Social Prescribing Network, so MS4N hopes that the workshop itself and this report will be a useful reference point.

For the MS4N project, the initial task will be to take the verbatim input from this workshop and see where it can integrate into measures, wider benefits and nature based solutions within the LNRS ahead of public consultation in the early new year. This report may also form part of an annex to the strategy.

This is what the LNRS regulations say on heath and access:

Reg 56. "But recovering or enhancing biodiversity does not just benefit the natural environment. For example, improving biodiversity can help increase land value or support people's health and wellbeing and access to nature. Whilst these co-benefits are different from the strategy priorities, responsible authorities and local partners can propose action for biodiversity in ways and in places that will achieve them."

Reg 70 "Responsible authorities may also shape potential measures so that they will deliver non-environmental co-benefits, for example improving public access to green space as well as helping biodiversity."

Beyond publication it will be about delivery of the LNRS which will include how potentially it can dovetail with the strategies and plans covered here and how it can support some of the health and access priorities described on the workshop floor.

The LNRS will be on a 5 year cycle, so effectiveness can be reviewed, and improvements made across future iterations.

Translation of workshop input into the LNRS

The verbatim input provided at the end of this report, captures all the suggestions provided by workshop attendees on how the LNRS might support health and access.

Some of these have made their way into the Priorities and Measures for the LNRS, many more will be picked up under "Nature based solutions" and "Wider benefits" for each habitat in the LNRS.

Verbatim input gathered in the workshop sessions

What follows is the information directly provided on post it notes at the workshop in response to questions on how the LNRS can support partners health and access priorities.

These recommendations will not all appear in the LNRS (and some might need refinement before they do), as this needs to follow Defra regulations, but there are plenty of useful suggestions below which might also be taken up in wider partnership work.

The following verbatim text, has been themed into groups – for ease of reading: -

Communities connecting with nature

More people involved in nature recovery will allow more community groups, ages to connect and take care of nature and wildlife settings

More funding for green social prescribing opportunities - more opportunities/awareness for self-referral

Green social prescribing - gardening groups and volunteering.

GSP to support people to access greenspaces further afield.

Develop a "what lives here?" approach - acts as a start to build a biodiversity plan

Access for low-income groups and areas of deprivation - realise the 15-minute green spaces

Real focus on communities who don't access green spaces e.g areas of deprivation, older populations, minority ethnic groups

Community green spaces to reduce anti-social trespass.

Establish stronger unity with the non-profit organisations

Giving people skills such as growing food, walking groups etc

Plan for group specific access at key points of the year

Education for children whose parents may not access nature - facilitate sessions for families

Educating children on protecting environment - more outdoor learning, including children in focus groups etc

Unite with school estates

[Link to] Kent Green Schools Strategy

Educational access (ELMS) - create school visits to farms (paying farmers) to experience outdoors

Connecting people with nature - our natural landscape, geology, history and how we are adapting to changing climate

Engaging communities with opportunities to bring people together - link to culture - outreach from organisation

Connects benefits - multiple positive outcomes

Using nature to tackle community connectiveness - reducing social isolation and loneliness. Proactively address health inequalities via nature

Access for all communities regardless of abilities or economic status. Opportunities for physical activity. Opportunities for communal growing, not just allotments.

Opportunities to inspire and educate people around nature to reduce impact but also connect to local area. Pride in local area - look after it - climate anxiety - integrating active travel solutions.

Volunteering opportunities - different groups to engage and benefit

How can the deprived communities access green space?

How does ethnicity and diversity influence access and use of green space?

Encouraging more diversity in communities participating in nature-based activities

Workplace access to green spaces during break times

Access to greenspace at work – advised that in London Business Improvement Districts tackle this – are there any in Kent?

Make green spaces accessible for those with neurodiversity. Encourage visits and highlighting benefits

Allotments can provide access to those who would not get access, provides mental health, social, community connection and opportunity to grow food which might not otherwise be able to get. E.g. In Dover, local food bank now has access to allotments.

Explore Kent routes are known to the public and also district, borough councils and health providers

Funding for providers to run nature and wellbeing sessions.

Barriers to using access

Awareness of routes- communication to public around what is on doorstep.

Encourage creation of more community groups throughout towns to enable individuals who lack confidence to go into nature alone to be able to do so with like-minded people. This has health benefits, combats loneliness and isolation, plus could benefit wildlife if volunteering e.g scrub clearance

Highlighting accessible routes and groups for people to access nature. Some people need support to access

Opportunities for all people and communities to access green and blue space - removing barriers for communities and disabilities

Focus on short distances from where people live and removal of barriers e.g direct walking routes, shorter distances where possible

Try to improve circular routes for all users

Make sure information about Rights of Way is up to date and easy to access

Ensure measures which might discourage access to green space are limited e.g license fees for exercise groups

Free access - removing barriers to accessing green spaces - inequalities, accessibilities, diversity. Information and equipment.
Access for everyone, including people with physical and or sensory disabilities [overcome fears of difficulties with access]

Woodlands – can be easier to get lost, or people may worry they will get lost [barrier], need good maps/signage
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Woodlands – Ash die back, tackle this to reduce concerns about access/opportunity to improve access to woodland

Accessible information – for example with details about pathway, to give confidence that people won't get half way round and find water or some other barrier e.g. to wheelchair access

Better maintenance of PROW network- lack of maintenance is biggest barrier (physical overgrowth, reduce littering/graffiti

Information needed about "accessible" routes- i.e. available for people with mobility impairment

Experience considerations i.e. alleys or retained PROW in new developments that was countryside

Provision of public toilets in urban areas- a significant issue for older people

Transport

Transport that is accessible – LNRS can map and target county level to improve accessibility e.g. green bridges (used for both wildlife and people)

Target low-income/poor transport communities

Green space accessible by public transport, places such as Shorne Country Park can only be reached by car

Accessibility for new forms of transport, e.g. e-bikes extend distances. Use bridleways. But also, problematic users such as trail bikes, which disrupt other users

Is there data showing access to green space via public transport?

Work with Councils and Visitor organisations to address high traffic areas

How to enable access to nature without encouraging car use

PRoW as wildlife corridors and access into natural greenspace

High quality nature rich greenspace close to home - everyone has access to nature within 15 minutes' walk from home

15 minutes from home is too long a period

Improvements/delivery close to population

Connecting access networks with associated ecological buffer zones

Need to connect - by corridors/paths - across habitats so wildlife can travel to adapt to climate change.

Provide stepping stone/pipeline of sites that give variety of experience of natural green space from town to countryside

Connectivity of greenspaces necessary to create meaningful routes and entice people further afield

Enabling investment for access to sites previously unfunded for public access (due to remit of landowner or funding rather than landowner wishes) - e.g footpaths viewing points heritage trails

Engage landowners near areas of low accessible green space - how to get new paths/access without anti-social/dog/behaviour fears

Engage landowners near areas of low accessible green space - how to get new paths/access without anti-social/dog/behaviour fears

National Trails – very keen to use as wildlife corridors [get more information, person who was invited couldn't attend – Isobel said they were very keen to be involved].

Create high quality (i.e. biodiversity rich) habitat along all National Trails e.g N Downs Way, King Charles III, England Coast Paths

Diversity in path types. Wild paths= tracks or greenways good for health i.e. strengthen ankles, different characters

Increase quality of existing sites and linear access - green links on trails and PROWs
Connectivity of ecological networks; connectivity of walking and cycling (and horse riding) routes and waterside, from urban centre to countryside.
An opportunity to have a joined-up approach to species e.g. hedgehogs, lapwings etc

Adopt principle of "least restrictive" approach in LNRS to enable nature and access to co-exist and thrive

Work with landowners to keep vulnerable people off busy roads

Lack of funding for the Rights of Way network- walking, disabled, cycling, horse riding, off-road bikes

Maintenance of existing PROW - identify best used PROWS - mapping to ensure these ones are maintained

Connectivity - public right of way often only connect by utilising roads - this inhibits use by people and must also be a problem for wildlife. Need off-road 'behind the hedge' paths for all users - including horse riders and wildlife.

Increase number of green routes and connectivity across urban and peri-urban and rural areas. Also linking with existing routes and PROW etc

Improving accessibility to PRoW networks – resting points, styles – with wildflower planting

Limit wildlife disturbance

Provide education and maps, signage, for dog walking – pressures off sensitive areas Marine and Coastal Code – not well known – and Countryside Code

Coast - Seal and bird disturbance on– provide education, work with tourist organisations to raise awareness among operators and visitors

Freshwater and coast – new users, paddle boarders, growing numbers

Is there data on foot traffic/visitor numbers for disturbance?

Ensure access to nature is not detrimental to wildlife.

Provide refuge areas where access is restricted to allow nature to thrive without people and explain why.

Health infrastructure and green spaces

Mapping health centres/hospitals onto green spaces across Kent and Medway. Visibility of plans.

Governance

Promote preventative approach to health via nature - physical and mental. Make agencies aware of their green capital so as to promote the benefits

[LNRS] be the way that we stop seeing health and nature as separate issues. Intrinsically linked, more collaboration

Ensuring that each LNRS measure considers health in delivery. E.g. could involve citizens in dormouse monitoring groups

Review Ramblers Access to Nature Bill

Funding – partnerships linking organisations doing similar things

Prioritise reducing unequal access to nature. Inclusion and access, health inequalities are often linked to poor access to nature

Addressing resources for analysis and delivery (funding) – maybe partnership

Planning & development

Draft local plan policies for urban greening and greenspace - access to greenspace, distance to greenspace, wildlife corridors, urban trees, SUDs and swales, and revise urban planning for a focus on people and planning, nature and planning in the same space

Encourage new build developments to have bigger gardens with more trees and hedgerows within and between gardens, and space for food growing (including in flats)

Target areas of health inequality for accessible green space - new or improved - look to involve community in new spaces

Protection of green spaces from the threat of development. Will a nature reserve today still be a nature reserve if it's decided more houses are needed? Does housing trump the health and wellbeing of locals?

Green space and access to green space to be important part of planning (early in planning stage)

Addressing inequalities in health through enhancing green infrastructure provision

Provide framework to enable planning teams to hold developers to account ensuring new developments prioritise green space, nature with a focus on quality

Increasing green spaces for species. Work with developers for the new developments 1.5m homes in 5 years. Advising people about appreciation of PROW and green network and the advantages

Access to nature for new developments via public transport/PROW. But can be a double-edged sword, access to public transport can be a reason for siting new developments

Can LPAs be given access to the data being used for the LNRS so that they can use same data in local plans?

Planning appropriate green spaces in new developments, linked to landscape character?

Where biodiversity net gain is offset by development, what about wellbeing through nature in new developments (i.e. will there be sufficient green space provided if the biodiversity is off set elsewhere?)

All new developments must create a new registered town or village green

Use of data

Layer NE priority habitat GIS layer over PROW network - ID which routes to prioritise for management to improve quality of experience

Mapping info & needs – access & health

Urban environment

Urban greening – window boxes, SUDS, tree planting, paving, green roofs & bus stops, linking habitats through towns and cities, urban wildlife walks

Develop a tree planting plan e.g tree council

Integrate bees - reach out to local beekeepers

Views are important for mental health as well as direct access to green space

Enhanced use of incidental "green" space in deprived urban areas

Ensure natural green spaces are easily accessible to urban populations, especially those in deprived communities

Need to have connected pockets of urban green space to encourage wider exploration

Need to provide urban populations not just with a "taste" of nature but inform – how to access nature much more deeply

Urban access should not just be an end in itself, but a stepping stone to a much wider appreciation of nature