



KNP Board Meeting on “Health and Nature” - Minutes for 9th December 2022

Meeting held on Microsoft Teams

Attendees	
Matthew Balfour	KNP Chair
Gary Walters	KNP Vice Chair
Evan Bowen-Jones	Kent Wildlife Trust
Susan Carey	Kent County Council
Ellen Schwartz	Kent Public Health
Chris Drake	Kent County Council (KNP Co-ordinator)
Alan Jarrett	Medway Council
Nick Fenton	Kent Housing and Development Group
Cath Jackson	Natural England
Charles Tassell	Country Land & Business Association
Nick Johannsen	Kent Downs AONB Unit
Matthew Woodcock	Forestry Commission
Guests	
Vicky Aitkenhead	Nature and Wellbeing Officer, KWT
Victoria Carton	Explore Kent (KCC)
Tim Woodhouse	Suicide Prevention Programme Manager, Kent Public Health
Alexa Murray Mujtaba	Farmer Cluster Officer, KWT
Apologies	
Liz Milne	Kent County Council (KNP MWG Chair)
Gregor Mutch	Brett Aggregates
Helen Shulver	Kent County Council – Kent Environment Strategy
Rob Jarman	Kent Planning Officers Group (Maidstone Borough Council)
Alison Watson	NHS (Guest)

Actions	Who
Letter to Kent & Medway MPs highlighting the need for policy certainty.	MB/CD
KNP to get involved in the Integrated Care Board strategy in the new year.	ES/CD

Minutes

1. Introductions, apologies, and approval of September minutes (Paper 1)

The minutes were approved, actions signed off and new Board member Cath Jackson welcomed. Apologies provided are listed in table above.

2. Defra Test & Trial on Natural Capital and Blended finance

Alexa Murray Mujtaba, Farmer Cluster Officer, KWT, provided a summary based around interviews with farmers and landowners on how prepared they are to navigate new blended finance options, including biodiversity net gain, carbon sequestration, nutrient neutrality, and natural flood management.

The pilot also examined how local authorities, water companies and developers are approaching landscape recovery etc. Beyond the Test & Trial pilot, which is ending next June, the aim is to establish a landscape scale project that will incorporate aspects of blended finance.

The legislation gap in terms of Local Nature Recovery Strategy was not ideal for the pilot, but a general lack of policy and market clarity around blended finance was also highlighted as a concern amongst farmers.

For biodiversity net gain, the variance between some 20% and some 10% districts came up, along with a feeling of unfairness that those who have already carried out nature restoration work on their land don't get to benefit. There was however more interest around biodiversity net gain, than carbon, with a feeling that carbon markets and processes are not yet sufficiently developed.

The issue of tax came up in terms of negative perception around conservation covenants, nature recovery and the devaluing of land.

The most interest was around river/water related projects and threatened species

3. Questions and discussion

Charles had been to a Defra biodiversity net gain workshop in the morning. Gary was at the same event and said that too many questions were still unanswered which should have been resolved some time ago and this means that farmers will not commit, despite no lack of willingness. In terms of good examples on the ground he highlighted his contractor's award for regenerative farming, the Board recognised the work James Loder-Symonds had carried out both on Gary's land and other parts of the county.

Evan cited the example of nutrient neutrality, where policy development had been carried out too late, causing confusion. He suggested that better communications were needed across the piece to keep up momentum or, in terms of nature recovery, or it will be too late.

Gary agreed, saying that we cannot operate in a fog of uncertainty.

ACTION: Mathew suggested a letter to Kent & Medway MPs highlighting the need for policy certainty, in terms of blended finance and farmers concerns around longevity of schemes. The willingness of farmers to take part needs highlighting too and that we risk losing this good will, if the current uncertainty continues. The Board agreed with this approach.

Susan added that with this approach we should also be pushing for a meeting with the minister.

Nick Fenton said that developers need to work on these areas, and he will be picking this up with Evan. The framework needs developing and Natural England bringing in.

Health and Nature section – Green Social Prescribing

4. Ellen Schwartz, Deputy Director Public Health, Kent County Council

Ellen described her role in terms of health protection and tackling inequalities and described this literally a matter of “life and death”. She is also involved in areas such as avian flu.

For green social prescribing, she said the opportunity is to improve access to the countryside, the benefits of which for health are well described. The evidence around the health benefits of a connection with nature are strong and this also helps with a social connection. In some cases, volunteering also leads to people finding jobs. Connection leads to contribution.

Treatment pathways are needed, but the protection of the environment underpinning all this is key.

The Integrated Care Board has developed a strategy over the course of the last three months or so. The first draft is a high-level summary of the intention and direction of travel that will be published at the end of December. The public health team is working on plans to involve place-based partners in the development of work on the ‘wider determinants. There will be opportunities to get involved in this for Kent Nature Partnership. The strategy will be about the NHS prevention and inequalities agenda; wider determinants are also seen as vital, so will be picked up in parallel.

ACTION: KNP to get involved in the Integrated Care Board strategy in the new year.

Ellen suggested there is a real need for a narrative around green social prescribing to help push this approach forward and to target those who need it most.

Tim Woodhouse highlighted examples such as the Tonbridge Therapy Garden as being very focused.

Evan highlighted a conflict of interest as his wife Carrie runs the “Health Foundation”, with a campaign on wider determinants starting soon, he said the scaling up of things had been very slow and there could be a space for KCC working on this.

Evan also said that initiatives need to be about “biodiverse green space” and that this is where the real health benefits lie.

Susan said that landowners need to benefit financially from green social prescribing and that this seems to currently be an area of weakness.

Gary said it would be useful to see the maps of access against areas of deprivation as this should be overlaid with Local Nature Recovery Strategy next year.

Matthew Woodcock stressed the need for the new Countryside Code to be promoted alongside this.

5. Vicky Aitkenhead, Nature and Wellbeing Officer, KWT

Vicky has been working with the trust on green social prescribing for four years. Initially there was a project called “Take Root” which led to successful “Wilder Wellbeing” six-week programmes. There have been 20 programmes and 130 referrals, with a rapid recent rise in activity.

For 2023, there will be 9 programmes in the first quarter. These programmes are recognised by social prescribers and by clinical organisations.

Vicky moved onto the barriers which are mainly about the “stop, start” nature of funding and a lack of organisational sustainability for these programmes.

Active Kent & Medway and Involve have been two key organisations.

Finding a key GP interested in social prescribing is vital and currently, this is patchy.

6. Victoria Carton, Explore Kent (KCC)

Victoria described the Reaching Communities project, which is around green and blue social prescribing with an expression of interest for lottery funding currently going in.

If successful, the funded project would look to raise awareness across the piece on green social prescribing, whether NGO's voluntary/community groups or social prescribers.

She also highlighted that the Kent & Medway Green Social Prescribing Network will start again in the new year, chaired by Chris Walker from Explore Kent and this will be looking at how approaches can be scaled up.

7. Chris Drake – brief update on South East Nature Partnership work

In October SENP held a health and nature themed meeting and brought together NHS Integrated care system leads, Public Health leads and green social prescribers. The aim was to see how by working across the south east and scaling up we can ensure improved outcomes and move further and faster in these areas.

The initial outcome is that Molly Aldam, the Health & Environment Lead Adviser for Natural England in the South East, is setting up a SENP sub group on Health and Nature and Chris shared details of this ahead of the KNP Board. Green social prescribing will be one key focus of the group.

Chris said that we need to identify what aspects of this agenda are better addressed at this scale and to avoid duplication. SENP may also be a good forum for bringing in the national green social prescribing pilot findings, our nearest being Surrey.

The Board concluded that communication is key and that KNP is well represented across the projects and partnerships mentioned. Matthew highlighted the Kent Rural Partnership as this is also interested in health aspects particularly in the light of the suicide rate among farmers.

Nick Fenton said that health was also very much on the radar of the Housing and Social Care sub group of the Kent Housing and Development Group.

Cath Jackson recognised that the boom-and-bust funding for green social prescribing was an issue that needed addressing. She provided the following links in the chat:

Nature-based outdoor activities for mental and physical health: Systematic review and meta-analysis – ScienceDirect

<https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2022/04/12/social-prescribing-the-power-of-nature-as-treatment/>

Aside from engagement with the Integrated Care Board strategy, KNP will need to engage with the groups and projects mentioned in these minutes.

8. Brief updates (Chris)

a) KNP letter to Kent & Medway MPs <https://kentnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/KNP-letter-to-Kent-Medway-MPs-November-2022.pdf>

This welcomes the fact that following a worrying time around the mini budget, the government have recommitted to their 2019 manifesto on the environment, but presses for further action, particularly on aspects of the Environment Act.

b) Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Ministers have recently confirmed that they would like Natural England to aim to roll LNRS's out from April 2023. This will allow enough time to get the national policy framework in place ahead of work commencing in earnest to prepare the strategies. So, the secondary legislation KNP has been waiting for in relation to this, biodiversity net gain and other areas, should be available in the first quarter of 2023.

c) Conference season

The November Kent Environment Strategy conference was Chaired by Matthew. The agenda was broadly about nature-based solutions, with presentations from the Adaptation Committee on Climate Change and Green Finance Institute amongst others. This brought the subject to a wider audience including businesses and some landowners.

Two days later, the Kent Wildlife Conference was held at Kent University, by the Kent Field Club. Matthew and Chris went along, Chris presented on the KNP State of Nature in Kent report, but in the light of our "Data for Nature" meeting, it was good to build some relationships with the various recording groups. Matthew was impressed by the range of expertise in the room.

The Plan Bee conference also took place in November and in October the Old Chalk New Down conference was held and was a great success.

d) Avian Flu

Chris is a corresponding member of the KCC chaired Tactical Coordination Group on this. As of November, there were no confirmed outbreaks within captive birds, but there have been isolated cases in wild wintering bird populations, mainly waterfowl, but also some knock-on effect upon raptors and gulls that may feed on these birds.

Concerns is for the public and dogs in contact with such birds e.g., Mote Park. Public warning and informing signage is in place across the county, this is not to alarm people and instead focus on making them aware. Reporting cases to Defra is important, but not touching or moving dead birds. This is not currently a nature conservation emergency in Kent and Medway.

e) KNP response to the Draft Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2023-38 consultation

The letter, shared with the Board, was drafted with Gregor's help, and approved by Matthew. It was suggested by Susan, and it would seem that there will be other opportunities for KNP input ahead of adoption in 2024.

It raised some interesting issues about biodiversity net gain and how this fits with minerals sites as opposed to housing and this is an area KNP might wish to do further work on.

f) Plan Tree (Susan)

Since 11 October this is official KCC policy and has not been challenged. The £300K accelerator funding bid was successful. Capital funding is easier to achieve than revenue funding.

9. KNP meeting sequence, priorities, and themes 2023

Both Board and Management Working Group (MWG) meetings are set for 2023 and invites are in calendars. The next Board meeting is 2pm Thur 2nd March, possibly around Local Nature Recovery Strategy, if the secondary legislation has been published.

The joint Board meeting with KNP Management Working Group is Thur 18 May. Possibly a visit to the Darent Valley farmer cluster meeting KWT, landowners and others might have potential here. Chris will follow up.

10. AOB

Happy Christmas all!