



Terms of reference (July 2026):

Kent Nature Partnership (KNP) Strategic Group 2026/27

For strategic delivery of the Kent & Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Background to strategic delivery

Kent County Council (KCC) is the responsible authority for the Kent & Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), published in November 2025. The Strategy is set up to: -

- Direct action and investment to areas where it is most needed and where it will derive the greatest benefits.
- Steer losses and impacts away from the county's most valuable natural assets.
- Maximise the opportunities for development, land use and land management to make a positive contribution to nature recovery.

It will be integrated into local plans through the planning system, will channel investment from development through biodiversity net gain and will be a focus for other sources of funding.

The Strategy is to be delivered by organisations and groups across Kent and Medway. The responsible authority role is set out in the English Devolution White Paper as: -

- Leading and convening a delivery partnership.
- Embedding LNRS into local decision making.
- Identifying strategic projects and facilitating project development.
- Monitoring and reporting on delivery of LNRS priorities.

KCC, as the responsible authority for the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy, are utilising the already established Kent Nature Partnership as the Strategy's delivery partnership.

The Partnership was originally set up in 2012 and paved the way for LNRS development. It provides a solid base of delivery partners, but what is needed is an oversight and steering body, that supports the responsible authority in directing these partners and facilitating delivery of the LNRS. The KNP Strategic Group has been established to fulfil this role.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a new approach for the delivery of nature recovery. As such, there is not a blueprint or model for the county to follow. The next two years will see a process of determining what works best. What is laid out in this terms of reference, will take the KNP forward and provide the steering strategic direction for LNRS delivery.

The approach set out here will be subject to review and refinement later in 2027.

Purpose and roles of the KNP Strategic Group

The Group's overarching purpose is to provide oversight of, and steer and support, the delivery of Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The purposes are framed around the roles of the responsible authority (below) – essentially the Strategic Group is the collaborative framework that underpins and supports KCC in meeting these.

Purpose 1: provide a robust and collaborative delivery partnership for the LNRS

- Collectively own the strategic delivery of the LNRS.
- Champion and advocate for the Strategy, to gain support at executive levels and secure delivery partners across county.
- Advocate for and influence change on matters that sit outside of scope of Strategy to address but are critical to the recovery of nature in Kent and Medway.
- Engage with new partners and build relationships with bodies that sit outside the KNP, to maximise opportunities for nature recovery to be aligned with, and delivered alongside, other agendas such as access, health and wellbeing and growth.
- Continually review membership of the group, and secure new members as required, to ensure that it remains current, with complete and appropriate representation. This is to ensure the roles set out by the terms of reference are discharged and opportunities for influencing the delivery of nature recovery in the county are maximised.

Purpose 2: to embed the local nature recovery strategy into decision making and land use

- Be local leaders for the Strategy and demonstrate this by aligning with, and embedding, the Strategy's ambitions and priorities within organisation's own strategies and action.
- Use influence and networks to ensure the Strategy is fully embraced and adopted by the county's local plans and planning decisions.
- Acknowledging the competing demands on the county's land, use influence and networks to affect a change that encourages a shared land approach, makes space for nature and minimises degradation and loss.

Purpose 3: to identify strategic projects and support project development

- Identify investment and financing opportunities for the Strategy.
- Use strategic links and influence to generate and direct investment into Kent for the delivery of nature recovery.
- To review and agree project proposals to benefit from the strategic support of the KNP.

Purpose 4: to monitor delivery of the strategy priorities and ensure progress

- Endorse, own and monitor non-statutory KNP targets for the Strategy (targets TBC)
- Review progress of nature recovery in the county and make recommendations to ensure actions continue to deliver against priorities.
- To use Defra Reporting and Monitoring annual updates, Nature Recovery team Delivery Plan updates and KNP targets to inform the above.
- Use influence and networks to address barriers to the delivery of the Strategy.
- Review and scrutinise biodiversity net gain in the county, to ensure it is meeting expectations as a key delivery mechanism for the LNRS.

KNP Strategic Group membership

Membership of the KNP Strategic Group features senior officers and members, senior managers and executives from the following organisations: -

- Brett Aggregates
- Country Land & Business Association
- Environment Agency
- Forestry Commission
- High Weald National Landscape
- Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre
- Kent County Council
- Kent Downs National Landscape
- Kent Housing and Development Group
- Kent Planning Officers Group
- Kent Public Health
- Kent Wildfowlers
- Kent Wildlife Trust
- Medway Council
- National Farmers Union
- National Highways
- Natural England
- RSPB

Whilst the Strategic Group's roles and responsibilities are established and tested; the Group is being chaired by Kent County Council's Head of Environment. In 2027, the recruitment of a formal chair and figure head for the Partnership will commence. The Strategic Group is coordinated and supported by the KCC Nature Recovery Partnership Officer.

Members of the Strategic Group are asked to:

- Prepare for meetings and make an active contribution by reviewing agendas and papers.
- Be prepared to be a champion for the Strategy outside of the meetings, presenting a picture consistent with what was agreed in those meetings.
- Disclose matters of interest or conflict on issues that may affect decision making.
- Contribute in a politically neutral manner and represent sector not organisational interests.

KNP Strategic Group work plan

Routine areas of work for the Strategic Group include:

- Receive, review and comment on annual monitoring (Defra Reporting and Monitoring) – at the first meeting following the end of the reporting year.
- Review and determine projects to benefit from the strategic support of the partnership – every meeting (see appendix 1 - below).
- Receive reports from task and finish groups led by KCC Nature Recovery team, providing strategic guidance, advice, endorsement and support as and when required – this will be essential for projects receiving KNP strategic support.

In addition to these core functions of the group, an annual work plan will be agreed that will detail the key items of work to be overseen that year by the Strategic Group. This may be subject to change in order to respond to changing policy or new funding opportunities. An indicative workplan for the first eighteen months, is included in appendix 2 - below.

Review

These terms of reference will be reviewed after a year (July 2027) to ensure that they are representative of the role the group is fulfilling and that the Strategy requires.

APPENDIX ONE – DETERMINING PROJECTS TO RECEIVE KNP STRATEGIC SUPPORT

This relates to Purpose 3 above.

What does strategic support of the partnership entail?

The KNP role in strategic projects, starts with evaluation of projects which meet the criteria below. This evaluation will include an assessment of both the opportunity and risks related to each project. Strategic support for projects that go through on this basis, may then include: -

- Addressing any strategic barriers in order to realise the full potential of these projects.
- Bringing the expertise of sectors or organisations to project design where needed.
- Ensuring that any potential co- benefits between the project and other strategic priorities within the county are realised in a way that adds value and results in more effective project delivery.
- Championing and advocating projects to ensure they get the full support of sectors or organisations instrumental to the effective delivery and long term success of projects.

Where needed, KNP strategic support can continue through a project lifetime, for example to ensure milestones are met and to adapt approaches as needed.

Criteria for a qualifying project

To qualify for strategic support of the Partnership, a project must be:

- Delivering one or more of the LNRS potential measures.
- Situated in an area that could become of particular importance for biodiversity (ACIB).
- Collaborative, with multiple partners and involving multiple sectors.
- Large, landscape-scale.
- Present a high level of opportunities for nature recovery.

Other matters that will be taken into consideration include:

- Links to other priorities within the county.

- Interdependency with other LNRS priorities – i.e. other measures/elements of the LNRS that will not be achieved or be as successful without this project.
- Likelihood of financing/funding success and/or with a funding stream identified.
- Projects that are filling gaps and not duplicating the work of others.
- Projects that involve and support partners that might not have the resources to complete funding bids, but that have an important role to play in delivery of the LNRS.

Full evaluation criteria will be developed and published to guide the above.

A project not meeting the qualifying criteria will not be put to the KNP Strategic Group for consideration, so the Strategic Group will not need to review all nature recovery projects.

Projects that require the KCC Nature Recovery team's time in terms of facilitation, fundraising and coordination, will particularly benefit from KNP approval and strategic support.

How the responsible authority will support

Part of the KCC Nature Recovery team's role is to facilitate partners in delivering the Strategy:

“To identify geographies, organisations, and groups across the county that will benefit from project facilitation and funding coordination”.

To this end, the team are working with sections of the wider delivery partnership day to day, capturing their activity and aspirations in a Delivery Plan. These are the stakeholders that were involved in developing the Strategy or that the team has been in contact with on delivery.

This approach is helping to identify gaps in the delivery of LNRS Priorities, along with opportunities and projects to fill these gaps. In other cases, partnership working groups will be set up to address the gaps and identify project ideas.

The team know the Strategy well in terms of what it is saying about geographies that require a particular focus. So, for example, Strategy mapping, ranging from connectivity modelling to species heat maps or locations requiring nature based solutions, might all contribute to making the case for a particular project.

These are the areas the team can bring to the KNP Strategic Group, as the evidence base for projects requiring strategic support from the partnership.

Project proposals that involve using the team as a resource will particularly benefit from this selection process, Ensuring that the team's time is well spent and they have the strategic support of KNP members as necessary.

Projects Independently lead by stakeholders or not fitting the above criteria will go ahead without KNP approval or strategic support. They will however still need to be captured in LNRS reporting and will be brought to the KNP's attention on an annual basis, in order that that they can assess the overall success of the Strategy.

APPENDIX 2 - KNP STRATEGIC GROUP WORKPLAN 2026-2027

This workplan is based around purposes outlined in the KNP Strategic Group terms of reference.

Dates are indicative and can be adjusted at meetings of the KNP Strategic Group.

Purpose	Action	Timeframe
Purpose 1: provide a robust and collaborative delivery partnership for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy	Establish KNP Strategic Group with agreed terms of reference.	Achieved July 2026
	Review membership of Strategic Group and secure new members required to fulfil purpose and role of Group.	Ongoing
	Appoint new Chair of KNP – interim arrangement outlined in terms of reference.	By July 2027
Purpose 2: to embed the local nature recovery strategy into decision making and land use	Identify and agree priorities for influencing local planning (informed by the work of the KCC Nature Recovery team). Determine role for Strategic Group in supporting this.	Ongoing
	Identify and agree priorities for influencing land-use management change. (informed by the work of the KCC Nature Recovery team). Determine role for Strategic Group in supporting this.	Ongoing
Purpose 3: to identify strategic projects and support project development	Establish criteria for projects receiving strategic support of the Partnership.	<i>October 2026</i>
	Establish evaluation process for projects receiving strategic support of the Partnership.	October 2026
Purpose 4: to monitor delivery of the strategy priorities and ensure progress	Establish non-statutory targets for the LNRS.	January 2027
	Establish measures of progress/success for LNRS and develop associated reporting structure and process.	October 2026
	Identify any early barriers to LNRS delivery and mechanisms to address these.	Ongoing