
Subject:	ESTABLISHMENT OF CLIMATE AND NATURE FORUM
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet – 6 November 2023
Report of:	Roger Walton, Strategic Director (Place and Environment)
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Sue Beer, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance, Climate Change and Environment
Decision Type:	Executive Non-Key Decision
Classification:	Unrestricted

Purpose of the report: To seek agreement to a proposal to close the existing Climate Change Project Advisory Group (PAG) and to replace this with a Climate and Nature Forum, with wider representation including representatives of the Town Councils and local interested groups.

Recommendation: That Cabinet agrees to disband the Climate Change Project Advisory Group and establishes a Climate & Nature Forum.

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Climate Change Project Advisory Group (PAG) was established in 2019, following the declaration by this Council of a Climate Emergency. The PAG has met regularly since then receiving a series of reports on climate issues and overseeing the delivery of the Council's Climate Action Plan.
- 1.2 However, over the past year it has become clear that, whilst the PAG has been a useful forum to inform members, there would be benefit from involving a wider range of interested parties to work with the Council as we work to meet the challenges posed by climate change.
- 1.3 This report therefore proposes that Cabinet agrees to disband the Climate Change PAG and establishes a Climate & Nature Forum.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The past few months have provided a stark reminder of the challenge that climate change poses to our generation.
- 2.2 According to the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) implemented by the European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasts, September had an average surface temperature of 16.38°C. This was 0.5°C above the temperature of the previous warmest September, in 2020, and around 1.75°C warmer for the month of September compared to the pre-industrial reference 1850-1900 period.
- 2.3 The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said there is a greater than 99% probability that 2023 will rank as the warmest year on record. September was far and away the most atypically warm month of any in NOAA's 174 years of climate keeping. September 2023 was warmer than the average July from 2001-2010. NASA also confirmed that it was by far the warmest September.
- 2.4 North America, South America, Europe and Africa each had their warmest September on record. Asia had its second-warmest September, while September in Oceania ranked third warmest, according to NOAA's National Centres for Environmental Information.

- 2.5 For the sixth consecutive month, September saw a record-high monthly global ocean surface temperature. September 2023 tied August 2023 for the highest monthly sea surface temperature anomaly (+1.85°F or +1.03°C) on record. Antarctica had its warmest September (and sea ice extent remained at seasonal record lows), and the Arctic had its second warmest September on record.
- 2.6 The State of Nature report for 2023 shows for example, that climate change is now affecting all parts of the UK, with numbers of 13 species of sea bird declining by 24% since 1986 and distributions of half of flowering plant species have decreased across the country.
- 2.7 As we continue to shape the Council's response to the impact of climate change it has become clear that changing behaviours across our community will require partnerships to be established with a wide range of interested groups and Town & Parish Councils.
- 2.8 It is therefore proposed that Cabinet agrees to disband the Climate Change PAG and establishes a Climate & Nature Forum, which would potentially include elected members and officers of DDC, KCC, representatives of the district's four towns, plus a number of voluntary sector representatives.
- 2.9 Representatives of other organisations will be invited to contribute when appropriate on a project update and advisory basis. These could include, for example, bodies such as Kent Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Butterfly Conservation, Bumblebee Conservation and CPRE to name just a few,
- 2.10 It is proposed that Terms of Reference for the Forum will be developed for consideration by the members of the Forum which it is hoped will be able to meet within the next few weeks. As the Forum will not be a decision-making body it is intended that the Terms of Reference, once developed, will be reported to a future meeting of Cabinet for approval.

3. **Identification of Options**

- 3.1 Options to be considered are:
 1. To agree to disband the Climate Change PAG and establish a Climate & Nature Forum.
 2. To decline to support the Climate & Nature Forum and to keep the Climate Change PAG.

4. **Evaluation of Options**

- 4.1 Option 1:

Working with a wider group of local partners and groups will help support the Council's work to protect our residents and landscape from the pressures of climate change and making space for nature, it is therefore essential that we engage a wider network to deliver these changes. It is therefore recommended that Council agrees to disband the Climate Change PAG and establish a Climate & Nature Forum and this is the preferred option.
- 4.2 Option 2:

Given the benefit of involving a wider group of local partners to support the work on climate change this is not the preferred option.

5. **Resource Implications**

- 5.1 None other than staff resources included within existing revenue budgets.

6. **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

6.1 The proposal to formally create a Climate and Nature Forum is a clear statement of the Council's concerns regarding the impact of climate change and the commitment to net zero targets.

7. **Corporate Implications**

7.1 Comment from the Head of Finance & Investment (linked to the MTFP): Accountancy has been consulted on the report and have no further comments to add (SK)

7.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make. (HR)

7.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: 'This report proposing to disband the Climate Change Project Advisory Group and establish a Climate & Nature Forum, does not specifically highlight any equality implications. However in discharging their duties members are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>.' (KM)

8. **Appendices**

None.

9. **Background Papers**

None.

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