

Cabinet

13 January 2026

Creation of the Horsted Valley Local Nature Reserve

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Simon Curry, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration

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Summary

This report seeks Cabinet approval to develop proposals to formally designate the Horsted Valley as a Local Nature Reserve. The designated area will include Luton Millennium Green, Daisy Banks, Coney Banks, Barnfield, Bishop's Hoath Woodland, Snodhurst Bottom, Ridgeway Bank and Horsted Farm (Upper Horsted Valley).

1. Recommendations

1.1. The Cabinet is asked to approve the formal submission for the Horsted Valley to be declared a Local Nature Reserve in accordance with the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and following consultation with Natural England.

2. Suggested reasons for decision(s)

2.1. Declaring a Local Nature Reserve will protect and conserve a vital greenspace running through the heart of Medway, recognising its environmental importance and enabling the development of greater opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy and engage with its natural heritage and biodiversity.

3. Budget and policy framework

3.1. Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 gives local authorities the power to declare and manage nature reserves. Under the terms of the Act statutory consultation with Natural England is required before a local authority can declare a Local Nature Reserve.

4. Background

- 4.1. A Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is a protected area of land designated by a local authority because of its local special natural interest and, where possible, educational and community value.
- 4.2. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 describes a nature reserve as land managed solely for a conservation purpose, or land managed not only for a conservation purpose but also for a recreational purpose.
- 4.3. Land managed for a conservation purpose is described as providing opportunities for the study of and research into matters relating to the fauna and flora and physical conditions in which they live and the study of geological and physiographic features or special interest; and/or preserving flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features of special interest.
- 4.4. Land managed for a recreational purpose is described as providing opportunities for the enjoyment of nature or for open-air recreation.
- 4.5. Medway Council has previously stated its aspiration to apply for Local Nature Reserve status, as referenced on the website page for [Horsted Valley](#)
- 4.6. Horsted Valley is a chalk dip slope valley, circa two miles in length. It includes:
- Luton Millennium Green – Daisy Banks – Coney Banks – Barnfield – Bishop's Hoath Wood – Snodhurst Bottom pitch and putt course – Ridgeway Bank – Horsted Farm (Upper Horsted Valley). A map of the proposed Local Nature Reserve is attached as Appendix A to the report.
- 4.7. Luton Millennium Green is a community space at the northern end of the valley.
- 4.8. Daisy Banks and Coney Banks are chalk grassland habitats important for wildlife. In recent years these have become overgrown with scrub.
- 4.9. Barnfield sits in the valley below Daisy Banks and Coney Banks and its flat area makes it popular for sporting activities. However, it is also important for feeding birds and could be enhanced for nature alongside the sporting activities played there.
- 4.10. Bishop's Hoath woodland is an area of semi-natural ancient woodland.
- 4.11. Snodhurst Bottom is used as a pitch and putt course but is also home to important native flowers.
- 4.12. Ridgeway Banks is an area of semi natural woodland.
- 4.13. Horsted Farm (Upper Horsted Valley) is at the southern end of the valley and is a former arable farm now naturalised and utilised by the public.
- 4.14. Across its entirety, Horsted Valley currently provides a varying blend of public access and activities within an area of natural importance. This can be

enhanced through the designation as a Local Nature Reserve supported by a detailed and structure management plan.

- 4.15. Significant work on developing a ten-year management plan has been undertaken. This identifies a range of opportunities including clearance of scrub to encourage natural biodiversity on the chalk grassland, introducing grazing as a means of naturally managing areas of the LNR, and improving accessibility and interpretation to encourage enjoyment of the area.
- 4.16. When completed, this management plan will form part of the formal consultation required with Natural England prior to the declaration of the area as a Local Nature Reserve.
- 4.17. The draft declaration document which must be consulted on with Natural England must include a boundary map and management plan detailing ownership of the land, any agreements or partnerships, why the LNR site was chosen, aims and objectives, biodiversity management and environmental education, community participation, access and visitor management, as well as costs and funding arrangements.
- 4.18. Subject to Cabinet approval of the recommendation in this report, it is anticipated the necessary documentation will be completed by the end of April 2026 to enable formal consultation with Natural England to be undertaken. Natural England have been made aware of Medway's aspiration for the Horsted Valley through informal consultation, pending Cabinet's decision.

5. Options

- 5.1. Option 1: Do not proceed with a submission for designation of Horsted Valley as a Local Nature Reserve.
- 5.2. Option 2: Reduce the geographical size of the proposed Local Nature Reserve, concentrating on the reinstatement of Coney Banks and Daisy Banks as chalk grassland.
- 5.3. Option 3: Seek to designate the Horsted Valley (northern end Luton Millennium Green, southern end Horsted Farm/Upper Horsted Valley) as an LNR.

6. Advice and analysis

- 6.1. Horsted Valley is one of three valleys (the others being Capstone and Princes Park) which link the outskirts of urban Medway with the centre, and its importance is set out in Medway's 2021 Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework, which lists the following priorities:
 - Manage greenspaces to ensure they can accommodate high levels of visits
 - Manage Medway Council sites to improve biodiversity and access

- Protect and buffer the remaining small ancient woodlands
 - Develop urban promoted walking trails and link town with countryside through improved routes and public rights of way
 - Ensure greenspace includes thoughtful and inclusive physical design to deliver multiple outcomes to attract different population groups
 - Strengthen and reinforce natural features and accessible green corridors linking built-up areas with the wider countryside
- 6.2. Option 1: This maintains the status quo but fails to recognise the ecological importance of Horsted Valley. Nor does it match the aspiration stated on the Council's website to establish a Local Nature Reserve. For these reasons this is not recommended as the preferred option.
- 6.3. Option 2: This option would seek to improve Coney Banks and Daisy Banks, which have become increasingly over-run with scrub, negating the importance of the chalk grassland. However, it would fail to recognise the ecological importance of the whole of the Horsted Valley. Therefore this is not recommended as the preferred option.
- 6.4. Option 3: This option seeks to both recognise the ecological importance of the whole of the Horsted Valley and to implement a long-term management plan which will enhance the valley, protecting and conserving its natural biodiversity while making it increasingly accessible for residents and visitors. This aligns with the One Medway Council Plan priority: Enjoying Clean, Green, Safe and Connected Communities and the relevant sub-priorities: Provide improved opportunities to walk; reducing carbon emissions and improving air quality; and Protect and enhance Medway's green spaces and environmental assets as a means of effectively tackling climate change. This is therefore recommended as the preferred option.
- 6.5. A Diversity Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the development of the 10-year management plan, subject to Cabinet's decision on the recommendation within this report.

7. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Natural England does not support the Local Nature Reserve designation.	Natural England is a statutory consultee on the designation of a Local Nature Reserve and does not support the submission.	Informal discussions have been held with Natural England and they are aware of the potential proposals (subject to Cabinet approval) for the creation of a Local Nature Reserve. These discussions will continue up to the time when the formal submission is ready to be shared with them as a statutory	CII

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		consultee. This will ensure the view of Natural England are reflected in the evolution of the submission.	
There is significant public opposition to the designation of the Local Nature Reserve.	Residents, particularly those living close to the proposed Local Nature Reserve do not support its designation.	Pending Cabinet approval, a programme of consultation and engagement with residents will be undertaken prior to the formal submission. The aspiration for a Local Nature Reserve has already been reflected on the Council's website page for Horsted Valley.	CIII
There is insufficient funding to deliver effectively the management plan.	Proposals to improve the area as identified in the management plan for the Local Nature Reserve cannot be delivered due to insufficient funding.	The management plan will be discussed within the sport, greenspaces and climate response service and with the Portfolio Holder, Director, Assistant Director and senior colleagues in other services to ensure it delivers improvements which are financially realistic for budgetary purposes.	CIII

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely	I Catastrophic
B Likely	II Major
C Unlikely	III Moderate
D Rare	IV Minor

8. Consultation

- 8.1. The recommendation within this report has been set out following discussion with the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration.
- 8.2. Informal discussions have been held with Natural England as part of the development of the proposals prior to statutory consultation.
- 8.3. Discussions have been held with Kent Wildlife Trust for the potential to develop grazing on areas of the Local Nature Reserve, as currently happens at Darland Banks.
- 8.4. A programme of resident consultation will be undertaken as part of the preparation for formal submission, pending Cabinet decision on the recommendation.

9. Climate change implications

9.1. Creation of the Horsted Valley Local Nature Reserve aligns with the Council's Climate Change Action Plan 2025-28, in particular:

- Priority 5: Green and Resilient Medway
- Priority ambition: Medway's natural environment is protected, is resilient to climate change, and continues to absorb carbon
- Sub-priority: Medway's greenspaces are protected and enhanced with opportunities sought to enhance existing habitats and their resilience to climate change

9.2. This also aligns with the One Medway Council Plan priority: Enjoying clean, green, safe and connected communities and the sub-priority: Protect and enhance Medway's river, green spaces and environmental assets as a means of effectively tackling climate change.

10. Financial implications

10.1. There are no direct financial implications of seeking to designate Horsted Valley as a Local Nature Reserve.

10.2. Financial implications arising from the associated management plan will be managed within the service and through the annual budget-setting process.

11. Legal implications

11.1. Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 gives local authorities the power to declare and manage nature reserves. Under the terms of the Act statutory consultation with Natural England is required before a local authority can declare a Local Nature Reserve.

Lead officer contact

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Appendices

Appendix A: Plan showing proposed area of the Horsted Valley Local Nature Reserve

Background papers

None