

Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee

04 March 2026

Part 1 - Public

Matters for Cabinet - Non-key Decision



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Cabinet Member	Councillor Des Keers, Cabinet Member for Community Services Councillor Robin Betts, Cabinet Member for Housing, Environment and Economy
Responsible Officer	Robert Styles, Director of Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services
Report Author	James Fay, Leisure Services Manager (Outdoors)

Review of Roadside Nature Reserves

1 Summary and Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report presents a review of Roadside Nature Reserves (RNRs) following the monitoring of existing sites by the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership. The report brings forward proposals on future management, the expansion of existing sites and the creation of new RNRs for Members consideration.

2 Corporate Strategy Priority Area

- 2.1 Sustaining a borough which cares for the environment.
- 2.2 Roadside Nature Reserves can provide significant ecological and community value by acting as vital corridors that connect fragmented landscapes, helping species move and survive, supporting diverse wildlife - including pollinators and species that depend on undisturbed grasslands - and protecting rare and threatened habitats. They also serve as refuges for rare plants and animals, contribute to wider habitat restoration through seed sources, and strengthen climate resilience by maintaining species-rich grasslands.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** to Cabinet that:
- 1) Priority 1 and 2 recommendations within the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership report be progressed.
 - 2) Existing RNRs listed at **Annex 2** are expanded as proposed.

- 3) New RNRs are created as shown at **Annex 3**.

4 Introduction and Background

- 4.1 At the meeting of the Communities and Housing Advisory Board on the 15 February 2022, Members first approved the creation of 10 RNRs. Since that date the number has increased and today there are 22 RNRs spread across 12 locations. Current locations are listed on pages 2 and 3 within the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership report shown at **Annex 1**.
- 4.2 The current cutting regime for RNR sites involves cutting the area twice, once in March and once in October and cutting buffers adjacent to hard surface areas 12 times.
- 4.3 In 2025, as part of the Councils Climate Change Action Plan, Officers commissioned Medway Valley Countryside Partnership to undertake monthly surveys of existing RNRs to identify the range of species present and provide recommendations on future management to further support and enhance biodiversity.
- 4.4 Members will also be aware that the public open space at River Lawn was nominated for Village Green Status by the Council in 2025. This process remains in progress, and the resulting outcome and its implications for future management will be considered in due course.

5 Proposal

- 5.1 Medway Valley Countryside Partnership conducted monthly botanical surveys of all existing RNRs from April 2025 to September 2025 using quadrats to record plant species and their abundance. Each site included at least 10 quadrats, with larger sites containing up to 30 where multiple RNRs were present. Quadrats were arranged in sets of ten along a W-shaped transect. In addition to plants, any invertebrates observed were identified and recorded using field guides and verified with digital tools to ensure accuracy.
- 5.2 The full report received from Medway Valley Countryside Partnership can be found at **Annex 1**. The report gives a detailed position statement on each site and the success of these RNRs are highlighted by the positive range of species identified. The report also brings forward proposed future, prioritised, management and survey recommendations. Recommendations for all sites are summarised in the table on page 58 and 59 of **Annex 1**.
- 5.3 Consideration has been given to the recommendations, and it is proposed that Members consider progression of Priority 1 and 2 recommendations from March 2026 in order to further improve the biodiversity at each site. With regard to Priority 3 recommendations, consideration could be given to increasing internal staffing skills and knowledge in order to undertake such surveys in-house.

5.4 The recommendations also include the proposal for expansion of selected existing RNRs and the creation of new RNR sites. As such, Officers have brought forward proposals, for Members consideration, in relation to these specific recommendations. **Annex 2** shows proposed expansion of existing RNRs and **Annex 3** brings forward proposals for new sites.

6 Other Options

6.1 Members do not adopt the recommendations made within the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership report at **Annex 1**, and RNRs continue to be maintained to the current specification.

7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

7.1 The Director of Street Scene, Leisure and Technical Services confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

7.2 The costs of supply and installation of site signage will be met by 2026/2027 Revenue Budgets.

8 Risk Assessment

8.1 No perceived risks.

9 Legal Implications

9.1 None.

10 Consultation and Communications

10.1 The recommendations within the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership report include proposals for enhanced site signage.

11 Implementation

11.1 If approved, the recommendations will be implemented through a variation order to the Council's Grounds Maintenance Contract during the growing season, which commences in March 2026.

12 Cross Cutting Issues

12.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity

12.1.1 Some impact on reducing emissions in support of carbon neutral by 2030 or enhancing the natural environment.

12.1.2 Climate change advice has been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report.

12.1.3 Roadside Nature Reserves help boost climate resilience by protecting species-rich grasslands that support stable, healthy ecosystems. These diverse plant communities improve soil structure, limit erosion, and regulate water runoff, which in turn strengthens the landscape’s ability to cope with climate-related pressures such as increased flooding and drought.

12.2 Equalities and Diversity

12.2.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

12.3 Other If Relevant

- None.

Background Papers	None
Annexes	Annex 1 – Medway Valley Countryside Partnership Report Annex 2 – Plans of proposed extensions to existing RNRs Annex 3 – Plans of proposed additional RNRs