

Cabinet

20 October 2026

Lower River Medway Strategy

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

Report from: Adam Bryan, Director of Place

Authors: Adam Taylor, River Strategy Delivery Manager

Summary

This report seeks Cabinet agreement for a delegated authority for future strategy amendments to the Lower River Medway Strategy (previously called the River Strategy), in conjunction with progress of delivery of projects resulting from the strategy's partnership board and four themed sub-groups, and in line with the One Medway Council Plan and the developing Local Plan 2041. It also seeks agreement to publish a second iteration of the strategy, which includes some amendments following further consultation with some key river stakeholders.

As well as additional input from stakeholders and factual amendments, the name of the strategy has been changed from the River Medway Strategy to the Lower River Medway Strategy to clarify its geographic scope, focusing on the section of the river that flows through the Medway Unitary Authority area.

Health as a key theme has also been incorporated into the four stakeholder sub-groups and Marmot Place and Local Government Reorganisation have been introduced into the strategy's second iteration.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. The Cabinet is recommended to approve the second iteration of the strategy for publication, now called Lower River Medway Strategy, attached at Appendix 1 to the report.
- 1.2. The Cabinet is requested to agree to delegate authority to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Regeneration and Climate Change, to authorise further minor amendments to the strategy, such as for the purposes of correcting factual errors, formatting or typographical issues.

- 1.3. Subject to the approval of recommendation 1.2, the Cabinet is requested to note that a third iteration of the Lower River Medway Strategy will be published in 2027 to reflect stakeholder groups projects and long term aims.

2. Suggested reasons for decision

- 2.1. Approval of the latest version of the Strategy is recommended to enable delivery of the strategy within the funding constraints set out at Cabinet in February 2026 and the proposed delegated authority allows for changes to be made as needed.

3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1. The decision is within the Council's policy and budget framework including the Council Plan. No additional funding is being requested, and no funding is beyond that agreed at Cabinet in February 2026 is being requested as part of implementation and delivery of the second iteration of the strategy, now called the Lower River Medway Strategy.

4. Background

- 4.1. Medway's River Strategy was originally produced by SQW consultants and agreed at Cabinet in February 2026. It took multiple years to progress the strategy due to a combination of factors, including Covid, budgetary constraints and lack of staffing resource. Feedback from some internal and external stakeholders has provided the opportunity for some factual updates. These now need to be approved by Cabinet and a delegated authority is requested to enable future minor amends to be made to the Strategy without it having to be brought back to Cabinet.
- 4.2. A River Strategy Delivery Team consisting of River Strategy Delivery Manager and River Strategy Delivery Officer were appointed over Spring/Summer 2026 to work until March 2028, as well as £40,000 funding, split over the financial years 2026/27 and 2027/28. This funding is supporting the setting up and implementation of five groups - a main Stakeholder Partnership Board and four themed stakeholder groups.
- 4.3. Now that staffing resource is in place, the main partnership board has been set up. The first board meeting took place on 27 July 2026 and included attendees from the following organisations and apologies due to staff absences for Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Natural England:
 - Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration (Chair)
 - Assistant Director for Regeneration (Senior Reporting Officer)
 - Medway and Swale Boating Association
 - Peel Ports
 - Chatham Maritime Trust

- Rochester Bridge Trust
- Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust
- Environment Agency
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- North Kent Marshes Water Level Management Board
- River Strategy Delivery Team (Administration)

- 4.4. The River Strategy Delivery Team are now in the process of setting up four themed stakeholder sub-groups; Health, Sport & Leisure; Environment & Habitats; Culture, Heritage & Tourism; and Business & Economy, with the first meetings for each having taken place during 07 and 09 October 2026.
- 4.5. The strategy, due to its wide-ranging nature, is considered an iterative strategy that looks to progress and evolve over time, and this version is the second iteration. A third iteration is anticipated at a date to be determined in 2027, once all the stakeholder groups have been set up and some projects launched. This iteration will factor in continued consultation with both internal and external stakeholders and strategic objectives for continued collaboration between the Council, river stakeholders, partner organisations and local communities to enhance the river's contribution to Medway, and Medway's contribution to the river.
- 4.6. In addition to factual amendments, the name of the strategy has been changed to reflect the geographical catchment area of the river, as not all of the River Medway falls within Medway as a unitary authority area. Feedback from stakeholders at the first partnership board also expressed that there was ambiguity in the name as a river strategy could also be other things such as marine or water level management.
- 4.7. The River Strategy Delivery Team is acutely aware that funding for the planned work programme and project delivery will cease on 31 March 2028. Accordingly, the team is working at pace to establish stakeholder groups, deliver at least one agreed project for each group, and ensure these groups are fully established and self-sustaining before the funding period ends. This approach will demonstrate the value of continued partnership working and help secure ongoing stakeholder commitment and future funding beyond 2028.
- 4.8. In recognition of the constrained delivery timeframe, the River Strategy Delivery Team will focus its efforts over the next three months on establishing river stakeholder groups and facilitating positive engagement through workshops to identify and agree priority projects. The third iteration of the Lower River Medway Strategy will continue to be developed once these objectives have been achieved, ensuring it is informed by stakeholder priorities and agreed project opportunities.

5. Options

- 5.1. Option 1: Keep the published strategy in its original state but seek Cabinet approval for the inclusion of delegated authority to make amendments in the future. This is not recommended as the strategy published in February 2026 does not fully represent the opportunities that this updated version provides.
- 5.2. Option 2: Seek Cabinet approval of the second iteration of the strategy, now called Lower River Medway Strategy, and agree delegated authority to the Portfolio Holder and Director for Place to authorise further amendments of the strategy. This option is recommended to enable delivery of the strategy within the funding constraints as set out at Cabinet in February 2026 and allows for delegated authority for changes as needed.
- 5.3. Option 3: Delay publication of a new iteration of the strategy and reprioritise the workload of River Strategy Delivery team to focus on a fuller rewrite now and delay progression of the stakeholder groups, and delay delegated authority to allow for Cabinet approval on all updates. This option is not recommended as the current published strategy does not provide sufficient detail or authority to deliver within the timelines needed. There will be a further opportunity for another strategy iteration in 2027.
- 5.4. Option 4: Do nothing and keep the strategy as it was in February 2026, with no delegated authority to amend. This is not recommended as the strategy published in February 2026 does not fully represent the opportunities that this updated version provides and does not provide the appropriate governance for the implementation and evolution of the strategy.

6. Advice and analysis

- 6.1. It is recommended for Cabinet to support for approval for Option 2, to approve the second iteration of the strategy, which includes factual amendments and updates, and to delegate authority for further amendments to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration and the Director for Place. Changes to the strategy result from considering feedback from a variety of internal and external stakeholders, and the integrity of the strategy, and it is anticipated that more amendments will be required as the strategy delivery and stakeholder groups progress.
- 6.2. A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has been completed and is attached as Appendix 3 to the report, and its findings are summarised here:
- 6.3. The Lower Medway River Strategy is the first of its kind in 20 years and will enable a diverse range of groups and stakeholders who currently use and engage with the river and its waterfront for a variety of purposes including sport, leisure and professional marine centred services such as river tour operators and engineering services.
- 6.4. There are no identified negative aspects from implementing the Lower River Medway Strategy. Implementation should assist all groups to gain access to and benefit from the improvements to the river and its environs.

7. Risk management

7.1. The following risks have been identified and management of them has been considered in the below table.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Stakeholder consultation non-inclusion	The strategy should feel collaborative and include information about a wide selection of river users and uses. Not including consultation from a wide range of stakeholders, risks the strategy being inaccurate or non-representative. Not factoring in consultation from internal stakeholders risks the strategy working at odds with other Council strategies and One Council Plan priorities	- Keep a clear log of stakeholder feedback/consultation and keep channels of communication with River Strategy Delivery Team open - Keeping organisational name mentions to relevant minimum	A2
Strategy Iteration Risk – factual misinformation	Risk of including opinion or biased information	- Checking of facts versus just opinion - Consulting of internal stakeholders with links to strategy themes	B3
Strategy Name	The original title of River Strategy was considered confusing and ambiguous by many internal and external stakeholders	- Renaming the strategy 'Lower River Medway Strategy to ensure the geographical specifics are clear	B4

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		- Addition of a strapline of 'improving the river's offer, together' to indicate that this is a comprehensive, collaborative regeneration strategy	

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely	1 Critical
B Likely	2 Major
C Unlikely	3 Moderate
D Rare	4 Minor

8. Consultation

- 8.1. The River Strategy Delivery Team has factored in a range of external stakeholders' previous feedback from the original strategy development, that did not appear to feature in the finished product. New feedback has also been sought from stakeholders who are members of the partnership board, and they have had at least one further opportunity to look at the draft before it goes to Cabinet. Due to time and funding constraints, it has not been possible to seek wider external stakeholder comments. Internal stakeholders have also been consulted from both People and Place Directorate, from a variety of teams, and where possible, comments have been included.
- 8.2. All comments will be kept for reconsideration at a time when a future iteration of the strategy is developed. It is anticipated that this will be in the second half of 2027, to reflect on stakeholder group progress, and funded staffing resource. Further consultation will take place with a variety of stakeholders through the implementation of stakeholder groups, project development and implementation, and communication channels for stakeholders with the River Strategy Delivery Team.

9. Climate change implications

- 9.1. The Council declared a climate change emergency in April 2019 - item 1038D refers and has set a target for Medway to become carbon neutral by 2050.
- 9.2. Climate change is a recurring consideration throughout the strategy, and the Climate Change team have provided comments and suggestions, many of which have been factored into the second iteration of the strategy.

10. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) implications

- 10.1. Following the announcement of the pause on 7 September 2026, officers will monitor the ongoing situation and will consider any relevant impacts as they arise.

11. Financial implications

- 11.1. No additional funding is requested following the additional Cabinet approval of 10 February 2026.

12. Legal implications

- 12.1 The River Strategy Delivery Team has worked with stakeholders to ensure that any amendments to the strategy focus on factual amendments.
- 12.2 The Harbour Authority name has been updated to reflect the name of the Harbour Authority as The Port of Sheerness Ltd, owned and managed by the Peel Ports Group.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Lower River Medway Draft Strategy

Appendix 2: Examples of Houseboats Good Practice

Appendix 3: Diversity Impact Assessment

Background papers

[First iteration of River Strategy at Cabinet](#)

[Medway Ports Authority Act 1973](#)