



Wilder Horsham District

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End of Year Report 21 – 22

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Wilder Horsham District is a five-year partnership between Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT) and Horsham District Council (HDC) working to deliver a Nature Recovery Network for Horsham District.

The project officially commenced in September 2020 when project staff came into post and has since been working closely with local communities and landowners to help reverse the decline in species and habitats and enrich the natural environment for all residents and visitors. This report summarises Wilder Horsham District's achievements for the financial year dated 1 April 2021 – 31st March 2022.

COVER IMAGE

Honeybee, Lydia Petch



Sussex
Wildlife Trust



Horsham
District
Council

Achievements Summary

Landscape Resilience		
Progress Points		
<p>Nature Recovery Network map developed and published.</p> <p>Engaged with Natural England and the Local Nature Partnership over their approaches to Nature Recovery Networks</p> <p>Wilder Horsham District work party and survey volunteer roles formed. Work parties began.</p> <p>Nature Recovery Award ran an additional four rounds, with some of our recipients from our first two rounds completing their funded projects.</p> <p>Horsham District Council's Parks and Countryside department have been reviewing management of their sites and exploring opportunities with adjacent landowners to contribute to the Nature Recovery Network.</p> <p>Wilder Horsham District became a supporting partner to the Weald to Waves project. Working with landowners and land-managers in key areas including along the Adur and Arun and around St. Leonard's Forest.</p> <p>Nature Recovery Network prioritisation plan developed.</p> <p>Working in partnership with the South Downs National Park and the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust to deliver landowner advice.</p> <p>Engaged with the Upper Adur Farm Cluster and Arun to Adur Farm Cluster to raise awareness of the project.</p>		
	2021-22	Project Lifespan
Sites and Partnerships		
Landowner sites visited	44	50
Horsham District Council sites	2	6
Partnerships/projects involved with	10	19
Area of sites advised on	2541.5	2625.27
Nature Recovery Award		
Total Applications	14	20
Successful Applications	7	10
Pending Applications	4	-
Funding Value Awarded	£17,473	£28,341.24
Work Party Volunteers		
Number of work parties	8	8
Total volunteer hours	156	156

Achievements Summary Continued

Total non-project staff volunteer hours	21	21
Total volunteer in-kind contribution	£1,770	£1,770
Practical Works		
Hedgerow planted or improved (m squared)	200	200
Leaky Dams	24	24
Ponds Created	4	4

Community Resilience

Work Completed

The project has now engaged with the majority of known community groups in Horsham District, and continues to maintain relationships and support projects with these groups.

We have supported community groups with site visits, habitat management advice, grant funding, resources, and linking contacts.

We started attending in-person events for the first time (events were online only prior to this, due to Covid-19), helping to make new landowner/community group contacts and initiate projects.

Our communications and media presence continued to grow through the use of social media, blogs and print.

The Sussex Wildlife Trust Communities and Wildlife team contributed valuable time every week towards supporting the project through landowner visits, community group events and advice, and wildlife talks and walks.

Connected Horsham District Council with community groups seeking improved Council-owned site management for wildlife.

	2021-22	Project Lifespan
Community Links		
Community groups engaged with	6	25
Organisations engaged with	10	26
Parish/neighbourhood councils we've had bespoke contact with (%)	+32%	37%
Parish/neighbourhood council and community group talks	2	5
Events for communities	16	18
Communications		
Press/magazine/newsletter releases (that we are aware of)	128	160
Blogs	9	12

Blog views	4,328	7,498
Facebook followers' growth	198%	-
Twitter followers' growth	188%	-
Instagram followers' growth	1160%	-
Webpage views	4,968	14,688

Organisational Resilience

Work Completed

Meetings with West Sussex County Council to explore areas where the two organisations could work together. Priority focus for 22/23 will be changing management practices for road verges

Horsham District Council's Parks and Countryside department have been reviewing management of their sites and exploring opportunities with adjacent landowners to contribute to the Nature Recovery Network.

Parks and Countryside's new Grounds Maintenance contract is designed to be more flexible to allow for changes in management and has targets to phase out pesticide use within 1st term of contract.

Presentations to the Horsham Association of Local Councils and some Parish Councils to raise the profile of the project and encourage Parish Councils to act to improve wildlife in their areas and on their land

The project was raised during a meeting with the National Farmers Union. A follow up meeting is being arranged for May/June 2022 to strengthen links with landowners and farmers in the district

We circulated an initial staff opinion survey to Horsham District Council staff to gain an understanding of staff knowledge and enthusiasm for the project and the principles of building a Nature Recovery Network. A follow-up survey will be issued at the end of the project's 5 years to see if and how staff attitudes and awareness has changed.

A continued programme of staff talks ran throughout the year, with topics including 'Nature on Your Doorstep' and Sussex Wildlife Trust's 'Help our Kelp' project.

	2021-22	Project Lifespan
Time Spent		
PDAGs	0	2
Horsham District Council CPD Hours	33.5	41.5
Staff and member talks	3 (3 cancelled due to staff illness)	7
Finance		
2021/22 Budget	£57,829.49	£142,029.49
Annual Expenditure (incl. grant funding)	£62,629.35	103,980.00

Project Progress Proposed Deliverables

Task No.	Deliverable	Responsible party	Date of completion	Progress to Date
1	Map a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) for the Horsham District which ultimately achieves better, more, bigger and joined up sites for biodiversity. The map should be kept up to date in accordance with evolving best practice.	SWT	End May 2025	The first version of a NRN map for the Horsham District was published in August 2021 and is now being used to inform priority engagement areas. As the project progresses and more data is added or becomes available the map will be further refined.
2	The NRN should ultimately aim to cover 30% of Horsham District and seek to achieve a 20% increase in the number of designated sites in positive management.	SWT	End May 2025	The areas identified by the NRN map cover a total of 29483 hectares (including the areas of the South Downs National Park and the High Weald AONB within the District). Horsham District is 53096.21 hectares in size, so the area identified by the map covers 55.53% of the district. However, this stage is only identifying land with potential to be included in the NRN and, obviously, we do not expect to achieve change on all this land. To achieve a functioning NRN covering 30% of the district it is necessary to target considerably more.
3	Identify priority areas within the NRN as a basis for focusing the work of the project.	SWT/HDC	Annually	A prioritisation exercise was undertaken this year to identify priority areas. The priority area for 2022/23 will be the proposed Weald to Waves corridor, including stretches of both the Arun and Adur River systems. This corridor spans from Climping and across the South Downs National Park into the heart of the district, connecting with Wiston Estate and the Knepp rewilding project and from there to St Leonard's Forest and Ashdown Forest.
4	Link the Wilder Horsham District NRN to the evolving Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the work of the Sussex Local Nature Partnership.	SWT	April 2022	We have several meetings with the Sussex LNP, including presenting the Horsham District NRN to the group and meeting with Andrew Lawson who was contracted by the LNP to map Nature Recovery Networks in parts of East Sussex to compare approaches.
5	Link the developing NRN to existing landscape and catchment initiatives within the Horsham District to increase wildlife benefit.	SWT	End May 2025	We have engaged with 19 existing initiatives including the Weald to Waves Partnership, the Adur and Ouse Catchment Partnership, the Arun Valley Wader Project, the Upper Adur Farm Cluster, and the Arun to Adur Farm Cluster

Task No.	Deliverable	Responsible party	Date of completion	Progress to Date
6	Provide bespoke advice to a minimum of 60% of Parish/Neighbourhood Councils, 80 community groups and 120 landowners. For this advice & support to reflect the geographical spread of the project's annual priorities	SWT	End of May 2025	Up to the end of March 2022, the project has had bespoke contact with 37% of Parish and Neighbourhood Councils, 24 community groups and 50 landowners or land-managers. These have been evenly scattered across the district. Next year we will aim to target landowner advice along the Weald to Waves project area and focus on linking adjacent landholdings.
7	Operate and promote the Nature Recovery Award. Report on the number of awards given, a description of the projects, including the type, total hectarage and distances of new or improved habitats.	SWT	Annually	14 applications were submitted to the Nature Recovery Award over 4 funding rounds. A total of £17,473 was awarded to 7 applications. A further 4 were advised to resubmit with changes. Award outcomes are stated in report cards issued at quarterly Steering Group meetings. The Award and successful recipients have been promoted on the project's webpage, blog, external websites, external talks, social media, and local magazines.
8	Report to the project board including a financial update, number of contacts and events for landowners, individuals, groups and organisations and projects that have received support/advice. Data should include hectarage & distances of new or improved habitat, as well as the contribution to Natural Capital Services, where possible.	SWT	Quarterly (papers to be distributed a week before the Steering Group meeting)	Held quarterly Steering Group meetings, with a consistent agenda of sharing project progress through report cards, a financial update, risk register reporting, and other varied topics relevant to specific Steering Groups. The report cards highlight the key achievements in the last quarter across the three strands of the project – organisational, landscape and community resilience.
9	Produce an annual report summarising the progress and achievements of the project, using suitable mapping and metrics.	SWT	Annually (a maximum of 2 months after the end of the financial year)	Annual report produced and shared in a newly created project-specific visual format. This report includes a greater number and variety of reporting metrics and description than its processor as the project develops its on-the-ground presence and impact. This will continue to grow across each annual report.
10	Establish links with key organisations, such as West Sussex County Council and neighbouring Councils, to develop joint projects/working that will help deliver the NRN.	HDC	End May 2025	We have had three meetings with West Sussex County Council to discuss how their landholdings might contribute to the Nature Recovery Network, including a presentation on the NRN. The most recent meeting focused on roadside verges. We hope to increase our work with WSCC next year. We also presented the work on the Horsham NRN to Lewes District Council.

Proposed Deliverables Continued

Task No.	Deliverable	Responsible party	Date of completion	Progress to Date
11	Establish a volunteer taskforce to undertake practical tasks to support the establishment of the NRN and where possible to complete habitat surveys and ongoing monitoring of sites, with landowner's agreement.	SWT	End September 2021	The Wilder Horsham District volunteer taskforce was created in summer 2021, with the opportunity to be either a work party or survey volunteer. Our first work party was in November 2021, and there have since been 7 additional work parties. Our survey volunteers will receive training in spring 2022 and will be active in the coming year.
12	Hold three events (or equivalent) during the project to engage with the projects target audience, as well as an event to celebrate the successes & achievements of the project.	SWT	End May 2025	No events held to date, principally due to restrictions imposed by the pandemic. The project plans to hold workshops with Horsham Parish Councils in the coming year to provide pre-packaged ideas and support for those wishing to contribute to the Nature Recovery Network.
13	Hold the equivalent of 3 days of training/CPD for staff and members at HDC per annum.	SWT	Annually	3 staff talks (8 hours including preparation time). Unfortunately 3 other staff talks had to be cancelled due to illness and will be rescheduled for the upcoming year. The Trust provided a talk for staff on the Help the Kelp project as part of a Climate Action week coinciding with COP26. The strong link between addressing climate change and improvements for wildlife was emphasised to staff. We have had a series of meetings with HDC Parks and Countryside team to discuss how HDC land holdings fit into the NRN and to identify opportunities for nature corridors in and around the main population centres of Horsham, Henfield, Storrington, Southwater, Warnham and Pulborough.
14	Integrate NRN principles (incorporating biodiversity net gain) into Council planning processes, including the Local Plan & its supporting documents.	HDC	End December 2022	A meeting with the consultant that the Council uses for ecological advice and the project team to convey the principles of the NRN for the District and how this relates to the planning system had to be postponed. This should take place in May/June 2022. Planning Officers are attending the webinars run by the Sussex Nature Partnership to understand Biodiversity Net Gain and have commented on the consultation from Government on this issue.

Task No.	Deliverable	Responsible party	Date of completion	Progress to Date
15	Identify biodiversity offset areas within the NRN to link with potential monies generated by biodiversity net gain.	SWT	End December 2022	Work due to commence on this shortly, as part of the Local Plan Review.
16	Review key HDC plans and policies to align them with the aims and objectives of the project.	HDC	End June 2023	This work has not commenced, although the principles of WHD were reflected in the specification for the news grounds maintenance contract.
17	Develop a strategic approach to the management of Council land; including opportunities from development proposals and land acquisitions, to support the delivery of the NRN.	HDC	End December 2021	Regular meetings held between the WHD project team and HDC's Parks and Countryside department to identify where and how HDC land can contribute to the NRN, and potential opportunities for land acquisition. Sites for reviewed management plans have been identified, and opportunities to work with neighbouring landowners to HDC land have been highlighted.
18	Review and implement appropriate land management practices on Council owned land to contribute to the development of the NRN.	HDC	Review – end March 2022 May 2025.	HDC's Parks and Countryside have developed internal guidance for creation of no-mow meadow areas. The new Grounds Maintenance contract is designed to be more flexible to allow for changes in management and has targets to phase out pesticide use within 1st term of contract.
19	Review and update the Communications Plan. Report on the outcomes of this to the Steering Group; including relevant monitoring data.	SWT/HDC	Quarterly	Project communications are included in the Steering Group every quarter. The project continues to develop social media and blog content, which remain our most popular communication pieces.
20	Incorporate an online resource on the project's website, for groups/organisations to share experience and best practice.	SWT	End March 2022	Sussex Wildlife Trust's website is about to launch a redesign, including an interactive map for groups/organisations to share their work and best practise. A multi-departmental effort is underway at SWT to update and create a hub of resources for landowners and community groups.

Project Progress Comments on 2021-22

Project Activity

While Wilder Horsham District's first six months was largely focused on establishing the project's infrastructure and foundations and drawing up the aspirational Nature Recovery Network map, the year from April 2021 to March 2022 has been one of developing and improving ways of working and beginning the on-the-ground delivery of a Nature Recovery Network. With restrictions still in place for much of the year, Covid-19 has continued to impact the project, restricting site visits and in-person meetings, staff training and the start of our volunteer work parties. Despite this, restrictions only delayed rather than cancelled project plans, and combined with moving much of our work online, we have continued to make significant progress towards the delivery of a Nature Recovery Network in Horsham District.

A crowning moment of the year was the publication of the Nature Recovery Network map in August 2021. This is the defining document for the project as it sets out where and how a Nature Recovery Network could potentially be developed for Horsham District. With the document in the public domain, it marked the exciting transition between mapping a Nature Recovery Network and beginning to deliver it.

Much of this year has been spent initiating the groundwork for practical delivery, advising landowners and community groups with project ideas, joining partnerships and projects, providing funding for projects through our Nature Recovery Award, and establishing our volunteer work force. While there have been some wonderful success stories to report as the first of our partners and Award recipients complete their projects, it is in the coming year that we expect to report the leaps being made for nature's recovery as projects initiated this year come to fruition.

Achieving practical, on-the-ground change for nature's recovery is only possible with the support of the landowners and community groups we work with, and our wonderful volunteers. We would like to extend a big thank you to all who have been involved in Wilder Horsham District so far as we roll into our third year – it is your support that is making this project such a success, and we are very excited to see what we will achieve together in the coming year.

Landowner Engagement Highlights

There has been very high interest in the project from land managers, landowners, and community groups. To the extent that it has been impossible to keep up with everything and some very promising connections have had to be held over until next year. During the first full year of the project the landowner advisor visited 44 landowners representing covering 2541.5 hectares. Covid-19 continued to have some impact early in the year but fortunately land advice visits, which typically involve small numbers of people in open spaces where social distancing is easy to observe, were among the first activities to receive permission to recommence.

In this year our engagement with land managers and community groups has been largely reactive with the project responding to those that contacted the project directly. With this approach it is not surprising that the sites were spread very evenly across the district from close to the Surrey border in the North to the scarp slope of the South Downs and from Brookfields Farm on the border with Mid Sussex to Pulborough Brooks RSPB Reserve in the West. The visits were mostly to new sites for the project but there were also two follow-up visits to sites visited last financial year. The visits covered a wide range of sites both urban and rural, small and large sites, with a huge variation in site management.

Site visits have already begun to result in changes. For example at Mount Wood the landowner paid for a contractor to come in with a digger and create a woodland pond with benefits for flood storage, water quality and woodland habitats. The work was complete with the work of WHD volunteers (see below).

Following a visit to woodlands near Denne Park House in Horsham the owners of the adjoining woodland began to remove the invasive *Rhododendron ponticum* that was smothering the ground flora.

Nature connectivity and wildlife corridors are an important part of the project, and a number of sites have potential to link existing habitats. For example a site near Rackham has the potential to link Pulborough Brooks and Amberley Wild Brooks. Similarly we visited several landowners in

the neighbourhood of Chesworth Farm with Ryan Allison from the HDC Parks and Countryside Team which have potential to link with and expand the Chesworth Farm habitats.

Partnerships are key to the project, and we have worked closely with other conservation organisations doing joint site visits with the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust (OART), the Southeast Rivers Trust, the South Downs National Park, the High Weald AONB, Natural England and the Lost Woods of the low Weald Project. We are also working with other projects within the district, notably the Weald to Waves Project. This aims to create an internationally significant wildlife corridor linking Climping on the Coast to Ashdown Forest in the Weald. The proposed route crosses Horsham District and maps directly onto part of the Nature Recovery Network mapped by the

project. We attended the launch event at Climping on 10 June and continue to work with the project. Most recently we helped write an application to the ELMS Landscape Recovery Pilot involving 27 landholdings along the river Adur. We expect to hear in June 2022 if this bid has been successful and, if it is, it will provide a mechanism to connect significant sites of nature recovery in the Adur catchment and create a new ribbon of habitats running through a wildlife-friendly farmed landscape.

This project has highlighted a need for proactivity and prioritisation in our landowner engagement and moving forward we will look to be less reactive and more targeted in this work, while still taking advantage of good “windfall” opportunities as they arise.



Site visit near Chesworth Farm with Ryan Allison (HDC Countryside Warden)

Comments on 2021-22 Continued

Nature Recovery Award

The Nature Recovery Award is our grant fund that aims to support landowners and community groups wishing to implement practical schemes to expand and improve networks for wildlife across the Horsham District landscape. Funding of up to £5,000 is available per project, helping to ensure landowners and community groups wishing to support nature's recovery are well supported and not limited by access to funds.

Across the 4 rounds run in 2021/22, we are delighted to be funding 7 successful applicants of the 14 that applied, for a total value of £17,473. This value is subject to minor changes depending on the final costings of projects upon completion but represents an accurate and likely figure. We are also supporting 4 pending applications, which represents applications that were not successful in their initial submission, but projects we are encouraging to resubmit with our support and advice. The large range of projects funded, from scale, location and habitat and species impact, is exciting and will see a wide variety of biodiversity supported as a result.



The site of the overgrown South Downs Pond, restored by The Society of St. Columba.

With the majority of successful applicants only receiving funding in the last year, most projects are yet to be completed, or to start, and so we look forward to the coming year to see the impact they will have on our local habitats and wildlife.

However, two projects have now reached completion, The Society of St. Columba and Brookfields Farm both completing the creation of their respective large ponds that sit within landscapes being developed into a mosaic of habitats to support greater biodiversity.



Brookfields Farm Pond before, during and after the project

See next page for all successful applicants to date with a summary of their projects.

Applicant	Location	Project Details
2020/21		
Friends of Glebe Field	Pulborough	To create a community orchard in Glebe field that will support a mosaic of habitats, including the introduction of bat and bird boxes, hedgerow planting and the creation of wildflower meadows.
The Society of St. Columba	Wiston	To restore a large pond on the South Downs as part of a larger site-wide ambition to create a mosaic of habitats, converting the site to a mixed grazing, woodland and wildflower site.
Brookfields Farm	Woodmancote	To create a large pond, comprising on multiple depth shelves, to add greater habitat diversity to an area of land also being improved through the planting of a native hedgerow and a reduction in year-round equine grazing.
2021/22		
Holy Trinity CEP School	Lower Beeding	Year 5 and 6 children are improving their school grounds for wildlife, transforming a disused area into a wildlife garden with bug hotels, bird boxes, a mini pond, a hedgehog home, wildflower meadow and log piles.
Rackham Cottages	Parham	To support the natural regeneration of woodland and nationally scarce heathland damaged by browsing by fencing a proportion of the property.
Joshua Powell	Horsham District	Using small mammal warning signs and 'ghost' hedgehog signs in vehicle-wildlife collision hotspots to reduce human-driven mortality of small mammals, particularly the European hedgehog, and improve connectivity between viable wildlife habitat, in urban and suburban Horsham.
Lakeside Conservation Volunteers	Horsham	Removing the invasive species rhododendron from Ayshe Court Lakes, an area that is being managed to improve its value for wildlife.
Field of Dreams	Henfield	Transforming the land for wildlife, including the creation of a series of ponds and converting the low diversity grassland into a species rich meadow.
Raylands Country Park	Southwater	To support the continuation of the wildlife-friendly management of the Country Park by creating additional habitats such as the planting of a native hedgerow, apple trees, and strategic placement of kestrel and owl boxes on a site where these birds of prey are already known to nest.
Wild About Warnham	Warnham	To support the local Swift Action project and help rebuild the local Swift population in Warnham by funding a further 23 boxes (42 nest holes) on top of the existing 11 boxes already in place around the Parish.

Comments on 2021-22 Continued

Wilder Horsham District Volunteers

We established our volunteer force in summer 2021, and it has been wonderful to have so many local residents sign up and offer their time to the project. We have two volunteer roles, our survey volunteers, and our work party volunteers. Both roles are integral to supporting the development of the Nature Recovery Network, with the time and skills our volunteers offer enabling us to hugely increase the scale and impact of our on the ground delivery for nature recovery in Horsham District.

Survey Volunteers

Our 15 survey volunteers will help us survey various sites around Horsham for particular taxonomic groups, principally plants, butterflies (and other invertebrates), and birds. This will help generate a baseline for sites that are trying to improve for wildlife and help inform management changes to those sites. With the survey season primarily running through the spring and summer months, we are in the process of providing survey techniques and species identification training to our volunteers and are looking forward to beginning our first surveys in the spring and summer of 2022.



[Pretending to be the beavers of the landscape by learning how to create leaky dams](#)

Work Party Volunteers

Our 27 work party volunteers help us carry out vital conservation tasks on privately or publicly owned land holdings within Horsham District, with the aim of improving land for wildlife to help nature's recovery. In November 2020, joined by 12 of our volunteers, we hosted our first ever work party at Mount Wood, Rusper. It was a brilliant

day spent clearing logs and brash from a depression site in wet woodland to make way for a new woodland pond, and we finished this so soon ahead of schedule that we also enjoyed building numerous leaky dams to control the flow of water into the soon-to-be pond. This volunteer day has set the tone for the six additional volunteer days we have hosted since, where we have enjoyed completing a broad range of tasks, from plastic tree guard collecting, to hedgerow planting, coppicing, and more leaky dam building. Richard Black (Landowner Advisor, Wilder Horsham District) also gained his chainsaw license, which greatly increases the variety of work we can complete on our volunteer days.

Volunteer Impact

The impact of the effort of our work party volunteers is already clear to see. Across just seven work parties, our volunteers have:

- Offered 156 hours of their time, which when combined with 21 hours of non-project staff time also volunteered, totals to an in-kind contribution of £1,770.
- Removed approximately 300 tree guards from a local woodland, helping to reduce the presence of dangerous plastic fragments and the degradation of harmful plastic pollutants into the soil.
- Cleared a site to allow for the creation of a large woodland pond, generating an entirely new and relatively rare habitat that will help support a greater number and variety of species, including reptiles, amphibians, bats, birds and invertebrates.
- Planted a hedgerow 100 metres long and 2 metres wide with around 10 different tree species, which will act as a key connectivity corridor to the surrounding network of hedgerows and a newly created pond and provide vital food, shelter, protection and nesting habitat for a wide range of species.
- Created 24 leaky dams. These are a brilliant way to slow and store water in the landscape, helping to reduce flood peaks in times of higher rainfall and ensuring that water remains in flow channels and ponds in the warmer, drier months to continue to support the species dependent on the habitat it provides.



Wilder Horsham District volunteers on our first work party.

Thank You

A massive thank you to all of our volunteers, and also to Sussex Wildlife Trust and Horsham District Council staff Sam Buckland, Samuel Giacomelli and Andrew Rodgers who have offered hours of their time to the project through volunteering. The impact of your time is already clear to see, which exponentially increases the ability of the project to deliver practical works for nature's recovery. With so much achieved in just five months, we look forward to seeing what we achieve across the whole twelve months of next year.

Survey Volunteers

Victoria Hope, Paul Davy, Keyana Jeffrey, Anne Allott, Sue Blandford, Natalie Dipple, Nicola Nama, Adele Clayden, Antony Cook, Emily Thrift, Ruth Eastwood, Daniel Haskell, Abbie Dodge, Simon Budge and Tony Powell.

Work Party Volunteers

Victoria Hope, Natalie Dipple, Clare Landgrebe, Sarah Abercromby, Dean Burford, Susan Lee, John Green, David Cole, Nicola Nama, Keyana Jeffrey, Antony Cook, Stephen Woodcock, Adele Clayden, Harriet Mayo, Daniel Haskell,

Graham Faulkner, Alan Boyce, Jessica Burtenshaw, Camilla Barnard, Anna Meredith, Debbie Richards, Josh Wright, Julian Browning, Simon Budge, Tony Powell and Catherine Male.



WHD Staff and Horsham District Council rangers planting a hedgerow to add further habitat complexity and connectivity

Comments on 2021-22 Continued

Organisation Engagement Highlights

Project staff have engaged with project officers across all departments at Horsham District Council. Meetings with Parks and Countryside have determined how the team's land management can contribute towards the delivery of a Nature Recovery Network.

Wilder Horsham District provides a regular programme of talks for Horsham District Council staff, helping to raise awareness of the project and the conservation issues the UK and the world currently faces. A baseline survey was conducted to understand Council staff awareness of the project and its aims and objectives. Follow-up surveys will be completed halfway through the project, and at its end, to measure any shifts in awareness and attitudes among staff.

Extending beyond Council staff, the project was discussed during a meeting between Members of the Council and the National Farmers Union (NFU). An NFU meeting just focusing on Wilder Horsham District is being arranged for May 2022 to increase awareness of the project and the support it provides to farmers and landowners. We also presented the project to the Horsham Association of Local Councils (HALC) which explained the project and how Parish Council can get involved. As a result of this meeting, we will be hosting a series of workshops for Parish Councils in the coming year to present a variety of achievable project ideas they could implement in their Parish to support the NRN and biodiversity recovery.

Horsham District Council Parks and Countryside Department

This Department manages several key sites for wildlife across the district, such as Monkmead Woods Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Warnham Local Nature Reserve, Local Wildlife Site Chesworth, Motte and Bailey, Sandgate Park, Denne Road Cemetery, Southwater Country Park and Owlbeech and Leechpool Woods. The site management is supported by hours of volunteer input, with over 22,000 individual wildlife records have been submitted to the Biological Record Centre from these sites, highlighting the species richness to be found on the sites.

A key new piece of work taken on by the department has been to review how Horsham District Council owned land can contribute towards the development and betterment of the Nature Recovery Network. The management plans for all owned sites are being reviewed with wildlife in mind, offering the opportunity to enhance or change existing management. The department has also been reviewing sections of the NRN map around some of the towns and villages to see where there are opportunities to work with neighbouring landowners, for example around Sandgate Park near Sullington. This will lead to targeted engagement from the Landowner Advisor to try and maximise gains.



Wildflower road verge Horsham District

With wildflower meadows in serious decline, the department has been looking closely at how it can support the revival of such habitats. Internal guidance for the creation of no-mow meadows has been developed, and the Parks and Countryside Managers will be working closely to review amenity sites and playgrounds that could have a change of mowing regime to at least a proportion of their area, to benefit wildlife, or where new shrub beds could be created. The new Grounds Maintenance contract is also designed to be more flexible to allow for changes in management and has targets to phase out pesticide use within its first term of contract. The team is also involved in meetings with HDC's Planning department about Biodiversity Net Gain and the benefits and impacts the new requirement may bring.

Community Engagement and Media Highlights

With Covid restrictions easing enough over the past year to make attending site visits and events safe, we have made the most of being able to forge new links and strengthen existing connections with community groups in Horsham District.

Community Groups

We have now engaged with 25 community groups, which constitutes a majority of all active groups. Horsham District is fortunate enough to have a very active set of community groups working for wildlife and nature's recovery, and as a project we look to support each individual group in the way(s) that best support their needs. This has included site visits to offer management advice, hosting wildlife events like bat and butterfly walks, giving talks on the project at events, and funding community projects through our Nature Recovery Award. Another particularly opportunity has been learning about the work of Wild About Warnham, Warnham's local group for wildlife including a new Swift Action Project being developed in the village. You can read about the incredible work Wild About Warnham are doing in a blog David wrote for us [here](#).



Wild About Warnham, founder David Bridges, new Swift Action Project being developed in the village.

One highlight of the year is our work with Billigreen, Billingshurst's local group for nature and the environment. An initial site visit with Billigreen revealed brilliant butterfly habitat potential in multiple sites through Billingshurst, including habitat for the nationally scare Purple Emperors, White Letter Hairstreaks and Brown Hairstreak. We followed up with butterfly and bat walks to survey the area more and help engage the local community with their wildlife, and then invited Horsham District Council on a site visit, who own

one of the sites identified as valuable for butterflies. Now plans are being made between Sussex Wildlife Trust, Horsham District Council and BilliGreen to start improving this site in 2022 with the local community, protecting and enhancing what could be key habitat for declining butterfly species while offering the local community a chance to learn about their local wildlife.



Helen and Mela (Billigreen) Sorin (Sussex Wildlife Trust) and Jake (Horsham District Council) in the 'butterfly fields'.



Catching skippers while running a butterfly walk in Billingshurst

Comments on 2021-22 Continued

Events

We have enjoyed attending 12 events and talks this year, including Horsham District Council's Funding Fair, Nuthurst Carbon Buster's inaugural meeting, a talk on nature's recovery in Horsham District at the Drill Hall alongside Isabella Tree, and introducing the project to the new Storrington and Arun Valley Sussex Wildlife Trust regional group to initiate discussions on projects we could work on together. Presentations were also made to Rudgwick Parish Council and the Annual General Meeting of the Horsham Association of Local Councils.



Henri Brocklebank (Sussex Wildlife Trust) introducing the Wilder Horsham District project at Horsham's Drill Hall.

The latter was a good way to explain the project to many of the Parish Councils across the District and how they could improve wildlife in their areas. These events have been an invaluable way to create new connections, in particular generating new landowner contacts wishing to join the project.

Communications and Media

Our communications and media presence for the project continues to grow. We contribute standing articles to Horsham District Council's 'Our District' (readership of just under 64,000 households) and Sussex Wildlife Trust's 'Wildlife' magazine (readership of > 33,000), and feature in other publications such as the West Sussex County Times as well as producing monthly content for 10 Horsham Parish magazines.

We have grown our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram followings by 198, 188 and 1160% respectively, which are our key and direct channels to share weekly posts with people on the project's progress. Combined with our popular blogs that gained 4,328 views this year, these forms of communication have also evolved into an effective way to involve individuals and local communities in the creation and story of the developing Nature Recovery Network.



Chloe, Richard, and Helen presenting the Wilder Horsham District project to the Storrington and Arun Valley regional group, chaired by Phil Huggins

A blog published in September 2021 on local Horsham resident Piers Pollard's [garden transformation](#) for wildlife, included a pond, wildflower patch, standing deadwood and stone piles, was our most popular blog. It sparked [further blogs](#) from local residents wishing to also share their garden transformations, high levels of wildlife gardening enquiries to our email, and the story was also picked up by Horsham District's 'Our District' magazine 'This highlighted to us the levels of interest and demand from local residents in wildlife friendly gardening, which we intend to support in the coming year through increased resources and guides on our website. Our gardens and outdoor spaces, if improved for wildlife, could form an integral part of the Nature Recovery Network, particularly in more urban areas where creating space for wildlife is otherwise very challenging.



[Piers' garden transformation, including a pond, and wildflower patch.](#)

Sussex Wildlife Trust Communities and Wildlife Team

We would also like to extend a big thank you to the Communities and Wildlife team at Sussex Wildlife Trust, whose time spent contributing to the project week on week has been invaluable in developing the project.

This has included attending site visits to local landowners, leading wildlife events such as the butterfly and bat walks in Billingshurst, giving conservation-based Continuous Professional Development presentations to Horsham District Council staff, creating regular media content for the project and facilitating new landowner and community group connections for the project.

Much of the team's work that exists independent of the project also benefits Wilder Horsham District, notably the new West Sussex Churchyards project. This project aims to support churchyards in West Sussex interested in managing their land better for wildlife, including offering site surveys, management plans and volunteers to undertake practical workdays. Several churchyards within Horsham District are already benefitting from this support, such as St. Mary's Church in Billingshurst that is now leaving areas of the churchyard unmown and has stopped all pesticide use on their land.

Nature Recovery Network Prioritisation Exercise

With interest from landowners and community groups so high, it quickly became clear that working priorities would be key to enable the project to deliver the long-term support needed to develop strong working relationships and help our partners to see through the practical delivery works. Wilder Horsham District project members, including staff from Sussex Wildlife Trust and Horsham District Council, came together to draw up a set of priorities for 2022. These priorities will be reviewed and changed through each year of the project, allowing us to work with all landowners and community groups who wish to engage with the project, but crucially at different times to allow for more higher quality and more focused engagement.

Please see the attached document in the appendix to see Wilder Horsham District's working priorities for 2022.

Next Steps

Both the immediate and long-term goals and ambitions for the Wilder Horsham District project are now firmly rooted in pushing the on-the-ground the delivery of the Nature Recovery Network.

1) Funding

The Council has approved additional funding for the project to support more staff resources and increase delivery. This is in recognition of the capacity issues faced by the current staff and the overwhelming demand that the project has generated.

There may be opportunities to secure external funding to support the development of the NRN. The project team is currently assisting with a bid to the Landscape Recovery Fund, which is run by the Department for the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs. This will focus on projects that landowners and farmers will implement, with funding, to restore the River Adur. If the bid is successful, the first two years of funding will be the development phase of the project.

2) Proactively, rather than purely reactively, seeking landowner partnerships.

We need to become more proactive, rather than reactive, with our landowner contacts to start achieving habitat connectivity at a district level where there is interest and support. The Nature Recovery Network Prioritisation exercise addressed this need, and we will be largely focusing landowner engagement in the Weald to Waves project area for the upcoming year. This will constitute around 60% of landowner advisor time, still leaving room to reactively engage with valuable opportunities outside this current focus area. Our webpage will be redesigned and updated to reflect these focuses for the upcoming year.

3) Horsham District Council

Organisational resilience is a key strand of the Wilder Horsham District project, and Horsham District Council will be taking steps to increasingly align their strategy, decisions and land management with nature recovery in mind. This will require a review of existing policies and plans

to determine if they align with the principles of the project. Focused talks to key departments, such as Property and Facilities, will also be an important part of this aspect of the project.

One key document is the Local Plan. The update and review of this land use planning document has been paused due to the requirement for development to be water neutral. During this time the Environment Act gained Royal Assent which makes Biodiversity Net Gain mandatory in the planning system. The full implications of this requirement and how this should be implemented in the Horsham District will need to be understood and reflected in the Local Plan when it comes forward. There are strong links between the WHD and implementing Biodiversity Net Gain, given the contact and advice that landowners receive through the WHD project.

Over the next year engagement with Parish Council's on the principles of nature recovery will be increased. One effective way to do this will be by holding some workshops to help Parish Councils to plan actions in their areas.

The review of land management by Parks and Countryside team is identifying where there are opportunities for this land to contribute to developing an NRN for the District. This will be taken forward, alongside a comprehensive review of the ground's maintenance contract to change land management practices where possible, for example, changing mowing regimes around the edges of recreational land.

4) Help Sussex Wildlife Trust develop wildlife management advice sheets.

To ensure that all who approach the project, regardless of if they fall under the current focus area or not, are supported with clear and up to date wildlife management advice, we are also helping to develop a suite of advice sheets and 'how-to' resources. This will enable landowners and community groups to independently proceed with wildlife-friendly management plans with the confidence that they are undertaking it in the correct way, as well as providing a range of ideas for those considering what they can do to help nature recovery in Horsham District (and beyond).

5) Maximise the impact of our volunteers.

With our Wilder Horsham District volunteer force now firmly established, we will create a continuous programme of work for our work parties for autumn/winter 2022/23 to maximise our contribution towards practical delivery. This will also involve increased promotion of our volunteer force, ensuring that landowners and community groups are aware of this strand of the project, removing the limiting factor of time, manpower or the money to hire help in realising practical works for nature. We will also start our first survey season with our survey volunteers.

6) Support Parish Councils wishing to contribute to the Nature Recovery Network.

We are delighted that there is great interest from Parish Councils in Horsham District who wish to

understand how best they can support the project and nature recovery in their respective parishes. Inviting all Parish Councils, we will host a dedicated workshop presenting a variety of achievable project ideas they could implement in their Parish to support the Nature Recovery Network and biodiversity recovery. Each project idea will be accompanied with 'how-to' resources.

7) Engage with West Sussex County Council on Horsham District verge management.

WSCC currently run a verge scheme using volunteers to cut and collect. However this not sustainable. Lots of advantages to C&C. Principal blocker is perceived lack of public support – how can we change this?



A host of some of the landowners and conservation staff and professionals involved in the Weald to Waves project in its infancy.

Richard Black (Landowner Advisor)

Chloe Harrison (Community Support Officer)

With contributions from Horsham District Council Staff

Helen Peacock (Environmental Coordination Manager),

Jacob Everitt (Senior Countryside Warden)

Pete Crawford (Parks and Countryside Manager),

Wilder Horsham District

April 2022

Appendix

Wilder Horsham District – Nature Recovery Network Prioritisation

Our Priorities – Landowner Engagement – ‘Focus Clusters’ 2022

Weald to Waves is an emergent project aiming to facilitate the creation of a large wildlife corridor, including stretches of both the Arun and Adur River systems. The proposed corridor stretches from Climping across the South Downs National Park into the heart of the county, connecting with Wiston Estate and the Knepp rewilding project and from there to St Leonard’s Forest and Ashdown Forest. Horsham District and the key areas identified in the NRN are vital to the success of this corridor, and if completed it would constitute the largest continuous dedicated wildlife corridor in the county. However, there are currently no individuals working on connecting the gaps and engaging with landowners in the section of the corridor spanning Horsham District. Wilder Horsham District will therefore lead on landowner engagement and corridor connectivity within the Horsham District, helping to make Weald to Waves a reality.

What are ‘focus clusters’?

Throughout the project’s lifespan, we will identify a number of priority areas known as ‘focus clusters’ within the NRN. They will be used to prioritise landowner engagement and site visits, and to direct proactively seeking landowner connections and Nature Recovery Award funding applications.

Each year of the project will prioritise a different focus cluster, bringing them to a point where they are well developed and more self-sufficient before allocating more time to develop another focus cluster. Focus clusters will include key NRN areas and corridors, a mix of sites in the north and south of the district, and ideally c.25% inclusion of urban engagement. Horsham District Council land should be included, however the focus here will be on working with Parks and Countryside to generate land management improvements, and so will constitute a separate strand of the project. These focus clusters will occupy c.60% of our interactions and will be a proactive focus. We will leave remaining capacity to be reactive to valuable opportunities that will inevitably crop up. Our first focus cluster will be the Adur River. Until May 2022 we will assist the Weald to Waves Project in preparing a Pilot Project bid for Defra’s landscape recovery scheme.

Our Priorities – Community Engagement – Wildlife-friendly Verges

Roadside verges constitute a significant area of under-utilized but potentially highly valuable habitat for wildlife. The vast majority of verges in the district are currently mowed up to 5 times a year, but if managed under a cut-and-collect scheme (where safe and appropriate), they could become wildflower meadows, invaluable for pollinating insects and the species that depend upon them as a food source.

We will engage with West Sussex County Council, and initiate talks to suggest an alternate verge management scheme across the County.

We would like to support community groups to manage verges they have authority over for wildlife, and to secure their backing to begin to present Horsham District as a pilot area to WSCC for an alternate mowing regime.

Other Priority Actions – Increasing Resources and Managing Expectations

We will host a dedicated workshop for Parish Councils, presenting a variety of achievable project ideas they could implement in their Parish to support the NRN and biodiversity recovery. Each project idea will be accompanied with ‘how-to’ resources.

We will improve our contact page with a clear statement on the project’s priorities, and therefore what enquiries we will prioritize. This will also include guidance on what information interested parties should include in their initial contact.

We will create ‘one-pagers’ for landowners, community groups and parish councils, outlining how the project can support them, and how they can contribute to the NRN.

We will develop a suite of ‘how to’ guides and wildlife resources (alongside other SWT staff) to issue as advice sheets to relevant enquiries, or those that do not fall under the current focus clusters



Sussex
Wildlife Trust



Horsham
District
Council

