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Biodiversity Report 2025

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Introduction

What is the biodiversity duty?

The Environment Act 2021 introduced a strengthened 'biodiversity duty' for public authorities in England to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

In order to meet the biodiversity duty, West Sussex County Council must:

- Consider what you can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on consideration of the biodiversity duty.
- Act to deliver policies and achieve objectives.
- Reconsider and review those actions at least every five years.

Our local actions contribute to national environmental goals for improving nature. Through the 2023 Environmental Improvement Plan, the Government has committed to significantly improving the natural environment. This includes:

- By 2030, halting decline in species abundance, incentivising nature friendly farming on 70% of our countryside and protecting 30% of land and 30% of sea.
- By 2042, increase species abundance by at least 10%, reduce risk of species extinction, restore half a million hectares of wildlife rich habitats and three-quarters of a million of our protected sites into favourable condition.

Purpose of this report

The planning authority's considerations, actions and reporting are required to be set out in a biodiversity report to set timescales, at least every 5 years.

This biodiversity report documents what our organisation is doing to improve the environment. It includes the policies and actions we have carried out to comply with the biodiversity duty, our plans for future actions, and local planning authority biodiversity net gain information.

To achieve this, the Council has reviewed what it already does for biodiversity across its services, undertaken internal discussions across departments and strives to building on existing policies, partnerships and actions to maximise benefits for biodiversity and people, within the resources and influence available to the Council.

Section 1: Our plans, policies and strategies

The Council recognises the importance of conserving and enhancing local biodiversity and this is reflected across our organisation in our plans, policies and strategies.

| Policy/Plan/Strategy | Details |
|--|--|
| Sussex Joint Minerals Local Plan July 2018 (Partial Review March 2021) | <p>Policy M17: Biodiversity and Geodiversity</p> <p>Proposals for minerals development will be permitted provided that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no significant harm to wildlife species and habitats, or significant harm is effectively mitigated where it cannot be avoided, or (as a last resort) there is suitable compensation where there is still significant residual harm; • There are no unacceptable impacts on areas or sites of national biodiversity or geological conservation importance unless the benefits of the development clearly outweigh both the impact on the features of interest, and on the wider network of such designated areas or sites; • There are no unacceptable impacts on areas, sites or features of regional or local biodiversity or geological conservation importance unless the benefits of the development clearly outweigh both the impact on the features of interest and on the wider network of such designated areas or sites; • There is no loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including Ancient Woodland and aged or veteran trees, unless the benefits of the development clearly outweigh the loss; • Where possible, there are net gains in biodiversity, including, the creation, enhancement, and management of habitats, ecological networks, geodiversity and ecosystem services shall be secured consistent with wider environmental objectives, including Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and the South Downs Way Ahead Nature Improvement Area. |
| Minerals and Waste Safeguarding Guidance March 2020 | <p>Section 2.10. Proposals for prior extraction must not cause unacceptable adverse impacts to the environment or communities and will be considered in the same way as a mineral application, taking into account matters such as flood risk, noise and dust, highways impacts, the historic environment, and biodiversity.</p> |
| Our Council Plan 2021-2026 | <p>West Sussex County Council's overall strategic plan sets out the priority for a sustainable and prosperous economy, with an underlying commitment to protecting the environment.</p> <p>As part of our overarching commitment to protecting our environment we will continue to deliver commitments in our Climate Change Strategy. We will also seek to encourage and enable the community and businesses to innovate and make decisions which optimise the use of renewable energy, reduce carbon impact and promote nature recovery and biodiversity.</p> <p>The Council will continue to invest in and maintain our roads to enable a safe and effective transport option that offers choice, is convenient to use, enhances the environment and enables economic growth.</p> <p>The Council will maximise the use and value of our assets by looking creatively at how we might use them. We will consider a wide range of measures to protect and safeguard the environment to achieve this ambition.</p> |

| Policy/Plan/Strategy | Details |
|--|--|
| West Sussex Transport Plan 2022-2036 | <p>Enabling active travel and access to education, employment and services, and decarbonise the transport system while protecting the local environment.</p> <p>Protected West Sussex</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 8: Avoid where possible and minimise the impacts of the transport network on natural resources and on the natural, built and historic environment. • Objective 9: Improve the transport network whilst conserving and enhancing biodiversity. <p>Shared Transport Strategy & Rail Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid where possible or mitigate the negative effects of major improvements on the environment (including green infrastructure and flood risk) and communities; • Ensure major improvements provide a net gain in biodiversity. <p>Road Network Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reduce impacts on the environment and communities. If major road network improvements are being made, our approach is to ensure they enhance the environment, including Biodiversity Net Gain. <p>Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any transport interventions that would be likely to have a significant effect on a Habitats Site (listed in the HRA), either alone or in combination with other plans or projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would not have the benefit of the presumption in favour accorded via s.38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase 2004 Act at application stage. - Will be subject to assessment under part 6 of the Habitats Regulations at the additional plan or project application stage. <p>Outcome Indicator. Local Environment. Biodiversity on Major Road Schemes. Future Direction of travel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 10% increase, objectives 8 & 9. |
| West Sussex Waste Local Plan 2014 - 2033 | <p>The Plan recognises local, national and internationally designated sites in West Sussex, irreplaceable habitats and biodiversity opportunity areas.</p> <p>Strategic Objective 10 states, where new development is required, the biodiversity and geodiversity of the County will be protected and, where possible, enhanced.</p> <p>Where relevant, opportunities will be taken to maximise benefits for communities, and the environment. The natural environment is considered in strategic waste site allocations, as is assessment and mitigation of impacts to water environment and cumulative impacts of traffic noise and odour.</p> |

| Policy/Plan/Strategy | Details |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Climate Change Strategy 2020- 2030 | <p>The strategy provides a framework which shapes and influences every part of our business. The strategy is aligned with our ambitious target to be carbon neutral by 2030 and contributes to the national commitment to be carbon neutral by 2050.</p> <p>Benefits</p> <p>A protected natural environment and supported biodiversity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing the impacts of climate change will help to protect the natural environment and support biodiversity. • By making choices about how we take action to achieve this, for example by choosing nature-based solutions, can also help to enhance our local environment and deliver a much larger benefit than carbon saving alone. <p>We will adapt and be resilient to a changing climate, we will increase opportunities to achieve biodiversity net gain.</p> <p>County Council Commitments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have identified five key commitments which we will apply across all areas of our business when planning, delivering our services and operations. • We will adapt and be resilient to a changing climate • We will be an adapted and resilient organisation. • We will plan for the financial impacts of climate change. 1. We will prioritise solutions to adapt and protect where most needed, to reduce the risks for the most vulnerable in our communities. • We will adapt and build resilience to extreme weather events, such as heatwaves and flood • We will explore and bring forward natural capital solutions to address the impacts of climate change. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We will take positive action to sequester carbon in the natural environment. - We will prioritise natural flood solutions to protect people and property. - We will increase access to nature. • We will increase opportunities to achieve biodiversity net gain. |

| Policy/Plan/Strategy | Details |
|---|---|
| <p>Climate Action and Adaptation Plan</p> <p>Our priorities for 2024-2027</p> | <p>The Climate Action & Adaptation Plan (CAAP) represents our initial roadmap to 2030, covering the first three-year period from 2024 to 2027, and outlines the long-term plan for achieving the ambitions set out in both the Climate Change Strategy and Our Council Plan. The CAAP outlines how we will use our influence, resources, and strategic planning initiatives to tackle climate change and protect our environment.</p> <p>Since adopting our Climate Change Strategy in 2020, we have focused on reducing our carbon footprint, increasing our climate resilience, and protecting the wonderful natural environment we are so lucky to have here in West Sussex. We are pleased to say we have made significant progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are working with our neighbouring councils to develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for West Sussex to protect declining habitats and species. • We are also trialling a new approach to grass cutting which we hope will help to reduce the costs and emissions associated with ongoing highways maintenance, while increasing biodiversity. <p>We have identified 20 priority climate actions we will focus on between 2024 and 2027. Each of these climate actions aligns with at least one of the key commitments made in our Climate Change Strategy.</p> <p>Nature and environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursuing 'nature-based' solutions to mitigate the effects of climate change, sequester carbon, and protect the environment. <p>Our priority climate actions for 2024-2027:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop WSCC carbon offsetting plan and establish partnerships with other local and regional offsetting and nature recovery projects • Continue to lead and support the development and roll-out of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, biodiversity net gain, and the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. |
| <p>West Sussex Tree Plan</p> | <p>First adopted in 2020, the West Sussex Tree Plan sets out how West Sussex County Council will protect, maintain, and expand the county's treescapes. It also explains how we will work with partners and communities to create healthier, more resilient environments.</p> <p>Three strategic aims guide the Plan, which are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain the trees for which we are responsible • Protect trees at risk from development and other pressures, and • Improve tree cover across the county. <p>Updated every five years, the refreshed Tree Plan for 2026–2030 upholds these aims while introducing clear objectives and associated actions that collectively support the enhancement of West Sussex's biodiverse treescapes. Importantly, it reflects on many relating priority measures identified within the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy and aims to help deliver action on the ground. Each objective includes defined measures of success, performance indicators, and a high-level delivery plan that will be monitored annually. Together, these elements guide our ambition to create resilient, diverse treescapes that provide long-lasting benefits for people, wildlife, and the local economy.</p> |

| Policy/Plan/Strategy | Details |
|------------------------------|--|
| Ash Dieback Action Plan 2019 | <p>Published in 2019, the Council recognised that Ash dieback posed a major challenge to biodiversity in West Sussex, with the loss of up to 95% of ash (around 21% of the county's tree population) expected to cause declines in habitat quality, species diversity, and essential ecosystem services.</p> <p>In response, the plan commits to sensitive, risk-based felling; targeted replanting using species of similar ecological value; supporting natural regeneration; and aims to embed long-term biodiversity enhancement within the county-wide tree strategy.</p> <p>The Council commenced with major tree felling operations in 2022 which are likely to continue until 2029. Targeted tree planting has occurred to help mitigate local impacts where possible, though recovery relies strongly on natural regeneration and colonisation of sites affected.</p> |

| Policy/Plan/Strategy | Details |
|--|---|
| <p>Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2025</p> | <p>Objective 2 – Sustainable Development Create a common, informed framework for sustainable development that improves safety and resilience for people, property, infrastructure, and the environment through long-term thinking. Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), should be installed in new developments or retrofitted to existing sites, are measures used to manage surface water, which aim to improve the biodiversity, landscape, and visual amenity of the development site.</p> <p>Objective 3 – Collaboration and asset management Adopt collaborative approaches to understanding and managing flood risk assets and systems, prioritising the implementation of nature-based solutions.</p> <p>Improving the maintenance of assets, which can influence flood management, is a priority for WSCC. Innovation and technology can be deployed to better understand the maintenance requirements of the drainage system and also meet other water environment goals such as improving water quality. Smart sensor pilots should be explored in West Sussex with others.</p> <p>Nature-based solutions (NBS) for flood risk management often require less maintenance. They also provide co-benefits beyond flood risk reduction, such as carbon sequestration, water quality improvement, and biodiversity enhancement. In West Sussex, a focus on building awareness and implementation of NBS projects should be taken, including other RMAs, stakeholder organisations, and riparian owners.</p> <p>Where opportunities arise, work to improve understanding of barriers and opportunities to NBS should be delivered. This aligns with WSCC’s Local Nature Recovery Strategy and can provide avenues to improve resourcing, funding, and delivery of multi-beneficial projects.</p> <p>Measures and actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the implementation of nature-based solutions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inform communities and stakeholders on the benefits of nature-based solutions through online resources and in-person meetings. - Review and document barriers to implementation of nature-based solutions. - Signpost and consolidate national and county-scale best practice nature-based solutions projects. <p>The Strategy aligns with several of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy principles. The proposed catchment-based approach will support working at scale to support ecosystems and natural processes, such as natural hydrological attenuation of rainfall. Measures to improve awareness and action amongst rural riparian asset owners can align with showcasing and supporting action for nature across our farmed landscapes. The prioritisation of NBS and SuDS to manage surface water flood risk can act to bring nature into everyday life, providing places for people to benefit from and engaged with nature.</p> |

| Policy/Plan/Strategy | Details |
|---|---|
| West Sussex Economic Strategy 2025-2035 | <p>Section 4. Our Economic Assets and Strengths. Natural Capital & Green Economy.</p> <p>Maximise our natural resources and opportunities to restore or create local natural capital, where it can have the most benefit for our communities, wildlife, and economy.</p> <p>Ambition 3, Strategic Priority 2: Enhance the county’s biodiversity and natural capital – balancing communities and wildlife, alongside securing economic value including through regenerative tourism.</p> |
| West Sussex Capital Strategy 2025-2030 | <p>The Council Plan establishes an underlying commitment to tackling climate change and protecting the environment. The strategy has allocated a budget of 90.1m.</p> |
| West Sussex Digital Infrastructure Strategy | <p>Our strategic priorities are:</p> <p>SP2: Enable the creation of connected places, unlocking value for communities, businesses, public services and the environment. We will also expand our programme to include new areas of work such as accelerating infrastructure that can enable innovation ecosystems, including the role of open data in public and private sector innovation; enabling connectivity that supports environmental action on climate change and habitat restoration.</p> <p>SP3: Improve access to connectivity in hard-to-reach areas, reducing the digital divide and unlocking the potential of our rural economy. We will do this by trialling digital use cases supporting rural activities based on natural capital (e.g. growing, re-wilding, protecting our environment and heritage, visitor economy).</p> |
| Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025 to 2030 | <p>As included within the West Sussex Public Mental Health Needs Assessment 2024, the natural environment has a big impact on our physical and mental wellbeing, so maximising health benefits in our local environment is important. The West Sussex environment, both natural and built, is an asset (...) with places in West Sussex frequently feature in the national press as desirable places to live, work or retire.</p> <p>Children and young people reported having fun and doing activities and had good access to nature (contact with nature can reduce stress and improve mental health).</p> |
| High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029 | <p>The High Weald National Landscape (HWNL) covers a significant proportion of eastern West Sussex. The Council is one of 15 local authorities that part fund the HWNL and has a joint statutory requirement to prepare a management plan every 5 years. The adopted HWNL Statutory Management Plan contains information on how the HWNL conserves and enhances biodiversity: AONB Management Plan - High Weald National Landscape.</p> |
| Chichester Harbour National Landscape Management Plan 2025 – 2030 | <p>The Chichester Harbour National Landscape is predominantly within West Sussex and the County Council is one of its key funding sources and adopts the Statutory Management Plan; information on how the Chichester Harbour National Landscape conserves and enhances biodiversity can be found in within this document: Management Plan - Chichester Harbour Conservancy.</p> |

Section 2: Our actions & future actions that benefit biodiversity

This section presents the actions undertaken by the County Council and future actions that contribute to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity across its services, estate, functions and partnerships.

As the Council is anticipating local government reorganisation will take effect from 2028, this section has set out forward plans for the next two years.

Where a service or project has not been included, it does not necessarily mean no action for biodiversity has or will not be completed, but actions were not able to be captured at this time.

Sussex local nature recovery strategy

The Council is the responsible authority for preparing and publishing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for West Sussex, in accordance with the Environment Act 2021 and The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023. This has been done in partnership with East Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council, preparing a Sussex-wide LNRS.

The Councils have worked in partnership with supporting authorities (including Brighton & Hove City Council, District and Borough Councils and Natural England) and other appropriate persons (key stakeholders), taking reasonable steps to involve all supporting authorities in the LNRS preparation.

LNRS act as a blueprint for nature, identifying and mapping important biodiversity areas and specific locations and actions to create, enhance, and connect wildlife-rich habitats. The LNRS build upon the established Lawton principles of 'bigger, better and more joined up'. Along with other current and new responsibilities introduced under the Environment Act 2021, LNRS will be critical to help us meet our local and national biodiversity targets.

As at time of publication of this report, the LNRS has been through public consultation in October 2025 and is now at its final stage of preparation prior to publication in spring 2026. Following publication, the LNRS will move into the delivery phase, where working with landowners, partners and other organisations will be key to achieving and monitoring biodiversity delivery targets.



An image of the front covers of the four parts of the Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Local wildlife sites

The Council is a partner and funding partner of the Local Wildlife Sites Initiative, which itself is hosted by the Sussex Wildlife Trust. The Council takes an active role in its management and site selection. Local Wildlife Sites are non-statutory sites that contain features of substantive nature conservation value. In Sussex these sites were formerly known as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs).

Local Wildlife Sites and their management play an important role in conserving biodiversity in West Sussex and form a core component of our Local Nature Recovery Strategy's core areas, known as Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity. LWS are also material considerations in the planning process.

The initiative establishes and maintains a functioning Local Wildlife Sites system. This includes the surveying and assessment of sites, liaison with landowners and consideration of new sites.

The Council intends to continue support for this important initiative that conserves and enhances some of the County's most important biodiversity.

Protected species district level licensing

Administered by NatureSpace, the Council holds a licence from Natural England for district level licensing of great crested newt, a European protected species. This option, which can be taken by developers, allows for a more flexible and sustainable approach to protected species licensing. The Council's licence was renewed in February 2026 along with many other Sussex local authorities.

The scheme creates both new aquatic and terrestrial great crested newt compensation habitat in suitable locations. Habitat compensation is delivered by the Newt Conservation Partnership and the long-term management and monitoring of all aquatic and terrestrial habitat is undertaken for a minimum of 25 years.

Across the wider district level licence area in England, hundreds of clean water ponds have been created or restored, and great crested newts have already been recorded in 84% of mature compensation sites created through the scheme.

The Council intends to continue providing a district level licensing option for great crested newts and is exploring options with partners for a similar scheme for other protected species, where sustainable long-term habitat can be provided for these species.

Nature friendly highways

The Council manages and owns a vast expanse of road verge in West Sussex that supports important habitats across our varied geology and landscape. These verges provide wildlife corridors, or nature networks, for biodiversity to move or migrate through the landscape. The Council has several specific projects and initiatives that conserve and enhance biodiversity:

Notable road verges

Notable road verges (NRVs) are stretches of road verges on the highway network that support particularly important species, habitats or spectacular displays of wildflowers. They are maintained differently to other road verges to help conserve and enhance biodiversity. NRVs have been in existence for over 40 years, leaving wilder habitats for native plants that are rare or of special interest in the UK.



Community road verges

Nature friendly verges are a relatively new initiative where local communities are interested in attracting pollinators to roadside verges in urban areas. There are currently 58 community road verges in 18 locations across the county. We maintained relationships with community road verge groups across the county, and in most cases, they oversee the verge and monitor it for improvements in biodiversity and wildflowers.



Pollinator highways

The Council is looking at ways of linking community road verges (CRVs) to the many projects in West Sussex and across the South Downs that are helping to create wildlife corridors. We are also working with local partners to establish pollinator highways - linked habitats joining up different areas. Local project partners include Lancing Parish Council and the Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group/Selsey Town Council. As of 2025, new pollinator highways are being established with Sompting Parish Council and in Worthing. We attended and presented at Horsham Green Spaces quarterly forums and continued to support Arundel's Green Team.

Road verge cut and collect and Greenprint

As identified in the climate action and adaptation plan, The Council is looking into new approaches to grass cutting which we hope will help to reduce the costs and emissions associated with ongoing highways maintenance, while increasing biodiversity.

Through 2024-2025, the Council's Greenprint project, funded by the Department for Transport's Livelabs innovation funding, continued to trial a new approach to verge maintenance. A new cut and collect verge maintenance routine was undertaken in Horsham, Aldwick, Bersted and Pagham. Cutting and collecting grass cuttings aims to slow grass growth and encouraging a wider variety of plant life and pollinators, boosting local biodiversity, and increasing the capture and storage of carbon in the soil. We are measuring the yield of cuttings and working with partners to explore how the cuttings can be used, such as biochar production.

Species recovery

The Council, in collaboration with the National Trust and the Western Sussex Rivers Trust, installed a specially designed 'mammal shelf' in a culvert under a road close to one of the county's only breeding otter populations. Road casualties are thought to be one of the main issues hampering the growth of sustainable otter populations to West Sussex. Rather than swimming under bridges or through culverts, otters will often choose to travel on foot, resulting in them crossing roads to reach breeding grounds. The mammal shelf will allow otters to travel safely on foot under the road on a ledge above the water.

Since 2020, Highways has planted 1,770 street trees, helping to maintain and enhance tree cover across the county while creating valuable stepping-stone habitats and improving wildlife connectivity within our built-up urban areas. This has been supported through contributions through the 'donate a tree' scheme which allows the public to fund local street tree planting.

Countryside and public rights of way

The Council's countryside service protects, manages and enhances the natural environment to ensure that our green spaces, country parks, nature reserves and rights of way are safe, biodiverse, accessible, and valued by the community. It does this by:

- Maintaining high standards of habitat management and land stewardship;
- Ensuring the public can safely enjoy countryside sites and rights of way;
- Protecting and enhancing biodiversity and natural capital;
- Working with volunteers, partners, contractors, and community groups; and
- Supporting the council's strategic aims around climate action, health & wellbeing, and sustainable land use.



The team plan has the following goals relating to biodiversity:

Goal 1 — Protect and enhance biodiversity

- Deliver management plans across all designated countryside sites
- Increase species richness and diversity through targeted interventions
- Support national/local biodiversity priorities (pollinators, wetlands, grasslands, woodlands)

Goal 4 — Support climate and environmental resilience

- Protect and enhance biodiversity
- Seek carbon sequestration opportunities
- Contribute to council climate action targets

The service aims to deliver the above through our countryside management team and public rights of way team's responsibility for managing the range of countryside sites owned by the Council including country parks, nature reserves, sites of special scientific interest, promoted routes and wider public rights of way network.

The countryside sites that we manage have a management plan including an annual and 5-year work programme setting out objectives to protect and enhance biodiversity. This includes agri-environmental scheme funding, e.g. Higher level stewardship (HLS) or woodland management plan targets and prescriptions. We also support partners to deliver biodiversity improvements, including the Gatwick greenspace project, RSPB at Pagham Harbour and Sussex Wildlife Trust Burton Mill Pond.

The public rights of way (PROW) in West Sussex offer a fantastic resource for people to access nature. The team manage over 4000km of PROW in the county and work with partners to deliver new routes, for example working with community groups to provide access to the countryside.

These efforts align closely with the objectives of the WSCC Climate Change Strategy 2020–2030, contributing to a more resilient and sustainable natural environment.



A photograph of a public footpath through a West Sussex ancient woodland.

Across all of Countryside Services volunteers play an important role in adding value to the work we undertake by helping with inspections and attending conservation tasks. Buchan Country Park has held a Green Flag since 2010, an internationally recognised mark of quality for parks and green spaces which have demonstrated exceptional levels of care, offering a sanctuary for people and wildlife.

Council owned and managed land

The service plays an important role in managing West Sussex owned land and delivering on the enhanced biodiversity duty by conserving and enhancing biodiversity within West Sussex. The service undertakes the following actions across both protected and other countryside sites:

- Control areas of invasive or undesirable native and non-native species
- Management of woodland habitats, areas of successional scrub and hedgerows
- Management and restoration of priority habitat including lowland heathland, chalk and acidic grassland and historic orchards
- Maintaining conditions in ponds and surrounding habitat for dragonflies
- Carry out monitoring and recording as required by HLS and undertaking surveys to compare past, current and future assemblages of key flora and fauna

Council owned and managed local wildlife sites

The service maintains and enhances linear promoted routes as wildlife corridors, including historic railway lines, the Downs Link, Worth and Forest Way. These sites are designated as local wildlife sites and managed for their substantive nature conservation interest. Ongoing management includes blackthorn and hedge management on the Downs Link for brown hairstreak butterfly, closed railway tunnel management for hibernating bats, and hazel dormouse monitoring as part of the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

The service manages Council owned sites of special scientific interest (SSSI), where it is working towards achieving favourable conservation status for all sites. These sites are support important habitats and their management plays an important role in conserving biodiversity in the county. SSSIs form a core component of our Local Nature Recovery Strategy's core areas, known as Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity.

Fairmile Bottom SSSI

The site supports important chalk grassland habitat that has been grazed with cattle for past 2 years and will continue to be in line with Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) prescriptions. The excess grassland sward is removed by cut and collect.

- December 2025 was the end of a 2-year HLS capital funded dog wood control programme (cut and chemical) and tree and scrub removal. Funding is being sought to continue this work.
- Woodland ride grassland is managed by annual cut and collect, controlling invasive species and control of scrub.

Buchan Country Park Ponds SSSI

The site includes heathland, acidic ponds, wet woodland and supports rare dragonfly species including brilliant emerald dragonfly. Actions undertaken, and future actions include:

- Management of ponds and wetland habitat for dragonflies
- Control invasive species, including rhododendron and bracken
- Coppice alder to improve wet woodland structure
- Manage and diversify ride edges through cutting
- Manage lowland heathland – scrub control, maintain diverse age structure, provide bare ground, maintain gorse cover to HLS prescription
- Cut and collect meadows to reduce fertility and increase biodiversity
- Maintain successional blackthorn scrub for brown hairstreak butterfly
- Maintain hedges to the HLS prescription

Burton Mill Pond SSSI

The site is important for its wetland habitats, rare plants, birdlife, and invertebrate populations, including the Desmoulin's whorl snail. The circular walk around gives the public a fantastic opportunity to see important habitats and enigmatic wildlife. Finishing in 2024, an extensive fenland restoration programme took place with HLS capital funding, which involved removal of trees from pond margin areas to improve biodiversity. Ongoing works at Burton Mill Pond include:

- Maintaining and enhance the open water and associated habitats
- Maintaining and restoring areas of lowland heath and acid grassland
- Maintaining and improving areas of fens, mires, wet woodland, and coppice alder
- Maintaining and improving areas of dry woodland, composition & structural diversity
- Controlling invasive species and retaining standing dead wood, where appropriate

West Sussex Tree Warden Network

The West Sussex Tree Warden network, coordinated by the County Council, supports locally appointed volunteers by providing training and regular updates, often focusing on biodiversity and tree conservation. Our wardens play an active role in enhancing local treescapes through planting, protecting, and promoting trees. They also lead school planting programmes and community projects that raise awareness of West Sussex's natural environment.

Section 3: Biodiversity net gain

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) became mandatory for major planning applications on the 12th February 2024. This was followed with small sites becoming applicable for BNG from the 2nd April 2024. The reporting period for covered in this report is from 12th February 2024 until 31st December 2025. Mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) for nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) is scheduled to come into force in May 2026.

Local planning authority BNG reporting

In the reporting period, the Council received 3 planning applications that required BNG, with 41 applications being exempt during this period.

The full biodiversity net gain information is provided in Appendix 1 BNG Quantitative Data 2024 – 2025.

The Council has provided BNG information on its website to aid applicants. This includes information on exemptions, mitigation hierarchy, strategic significance, biodiversity gain plans and links to useful information. The Council offers a pre-application advice service where developers can receive informal advice from officers about meeting the BNG requirement.

In November 2025, the Council updated its local list for the validation of planning applications, which details what is required for biodiversity net gain when submitting a planning application with links to further information and relevant legislation.

BNG on Council owned land

In addition to BNG within the planning function of the Council, the sustainability team began analysing the council's land holdings to identify opportunities for nature-based carbon offsetting and nature recovery projects. Field studies have been completed on 5 sites, and while these have been deemed not to be suitable for nature-based carbon offsetting, habitat assessment and monitoring plans were developed for further investigations into biodiversity net gain opportunities. Review of further land for offsetting or nature recovery is underway in line with the corporate Land Use Statement and options appraisal process.

The Council has incorporated nature-based solutions and other environmental improvements into projects, such as the Worthing Cross Street Active Travel scheme, and the Worthing Railway Approach Public Realm Scheme which commenced construction in February 2024.

The Council owns over 300 school sites and individual actions have been undertaken on many of these sites contributing to biodiversity. Several school planning applications have been subject to mandatory 10% biodiversity net gains. Improvements have included tree planting.



A photograph of a fly orchid on West Sussex notable road verge.