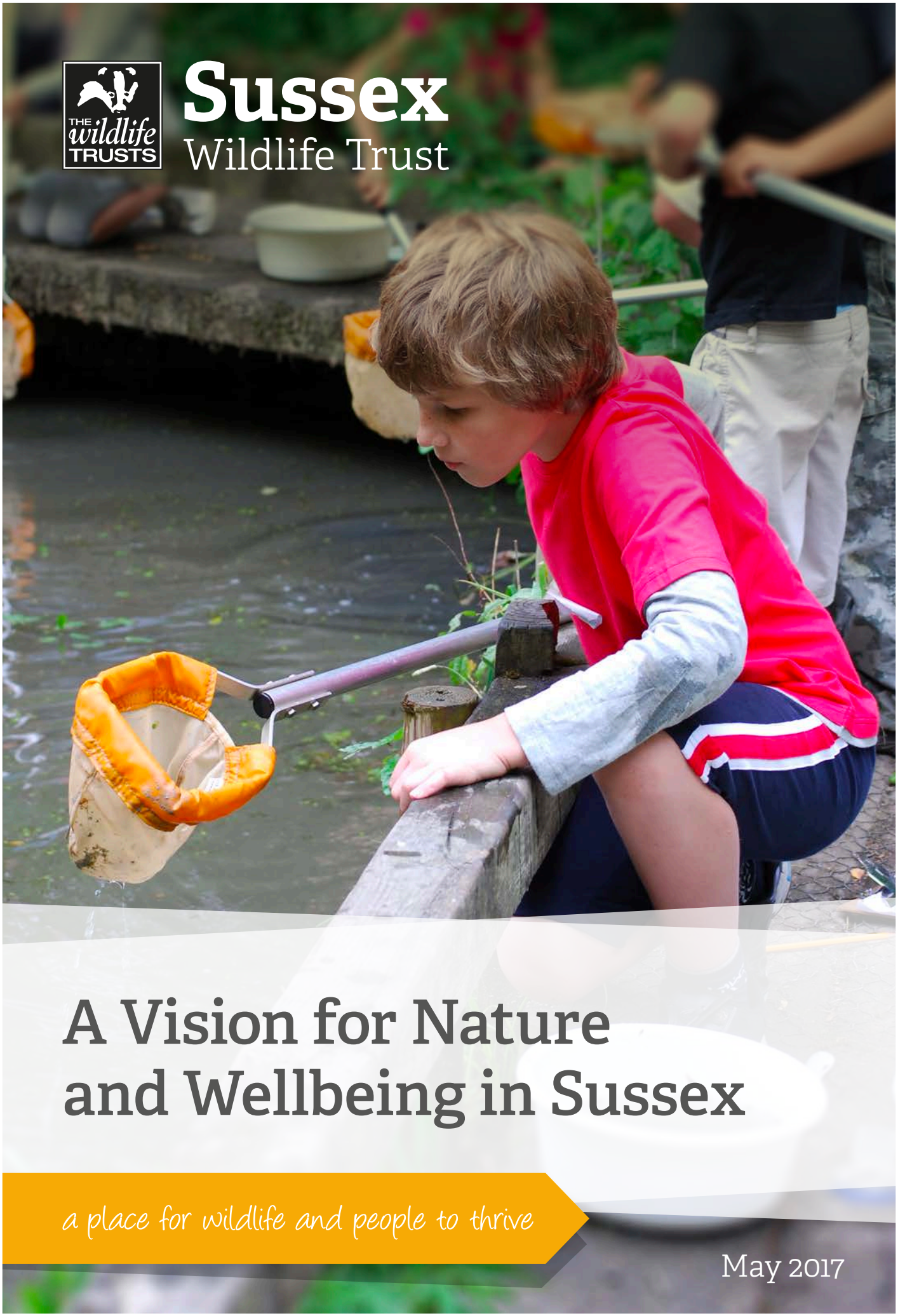


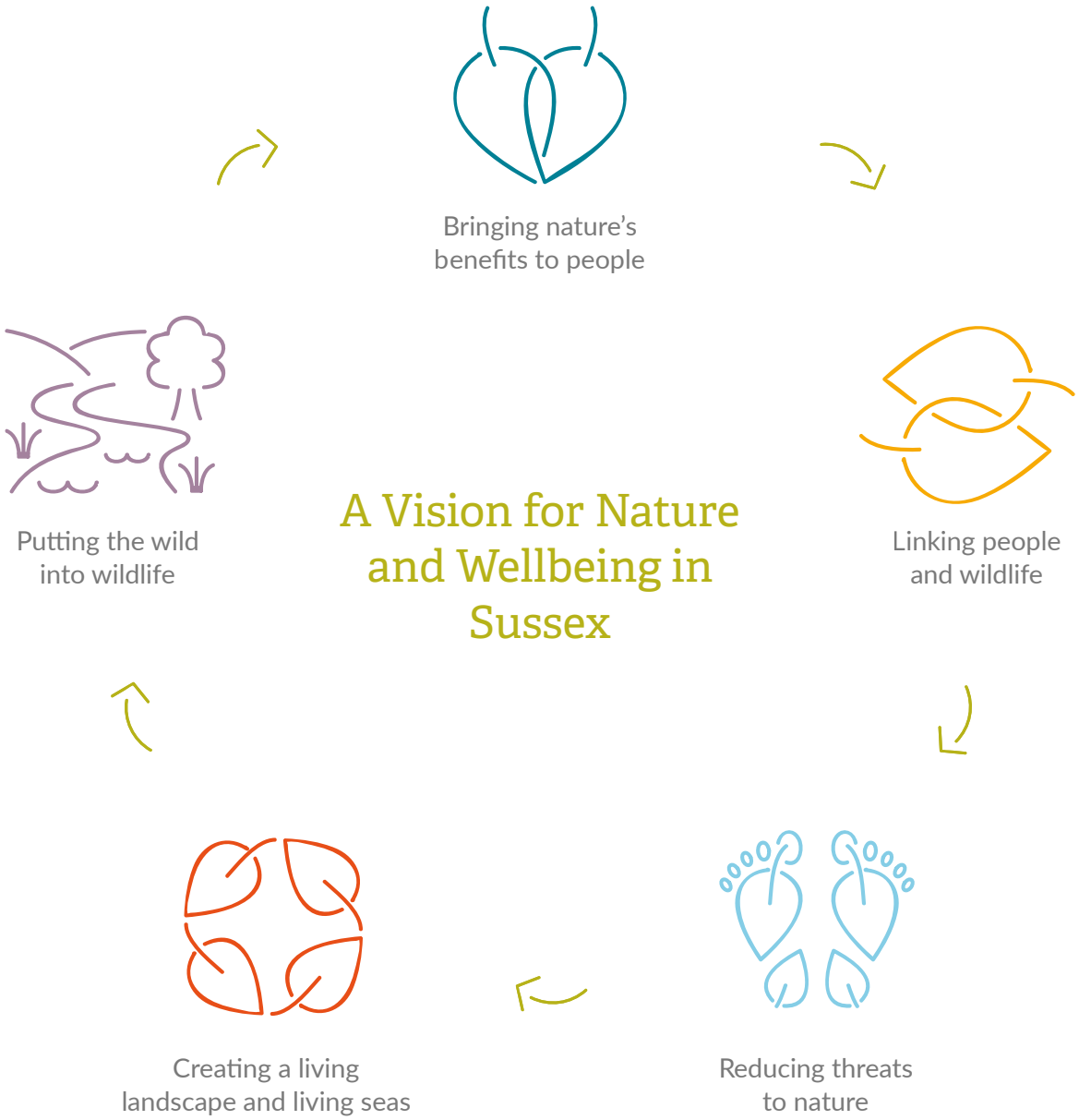
Sussex
Wildlife Trust

A Vision for Nature and Wellbeing in Sussex

a place for wildlife and people to thrive

May 2017

A Vision for Nature and Wellbeing in Sussex



Contents

Chairman's foreword

© Miles Davies

"Sussex is a beautiful county of great scenic variety, but 'the Weald and the Marsh and the Down Countree' so beloved of Kipling and so important as wildlife habitat face greater pressure than ever before as we approach the turn of the century."

This is a quote from the late Alan Malpass, who was Chairman of the Sussex Wildlife Trust when we wrote our seminal *Vision for the Wildlife of Sussex* 20 years ago (Sussex Wildlife Trust 1995). This document set a series of bold targets against a long-term vision. The objective was to turn the tide – to convert a history of wildlife loss and decline into one of restoration and improvement. A review in 2006, ten years later, reported some successes, where conservation activity had increased, where wildlife had improved and where people's experience of nature was improving, but these were exceptions. Losses may have slowed, but we had not turned the tide.

What was true then is even more so today, despite our best efforts. Threats to wildlife have increased, loss of nature has continued and people have become more disconnected from nature. Furthermore this is happening just at a time when human need for nature and our understanding of the natural systems on which we depend is becoming ever clearer.

The Sussex Wildlife Trust is a nature conservation charity. Our 'objects' are, in brief, to conserve the Sussex landscape, marine environment, its wildlife and habitats for the public benefit. We aim to record, monitor and survey wildlife, to engage people in education and to improve the public's understanding of the natural history and wildlife of Sussex. Establishment of nature reserves and protected areas, on land and at sea, is important to us and also allowing public access in support of nature conservation. In so doing we aim to promote good practice in the furtherance of sustainable development and biodiversity, as well as protect and improve nature in general. (In full in Appendix 1).

It is therefore our duty to conserve nature for public benefit, not simply in isolated pockets, but everywhere and close to all of us. Against a background of declining wildlife we, as a wildlife charity, need to redouble our efforts to achieve the purposes for which we were established. Our duty to further sustainable development also compels us to bring nature to the heart of decision making across the county.

The purpose of this document is to re-affirm our long-standing vision to make Sussex a place where wildlife and people can thrive. We will set out a number of broad 'ambitions' for Sussex – a high-level set of 'asks' for the county, setting the trajectory and magnitude for the sort of changes we feel are necessary in order to deliver our aim.

This is a vision for Sussex, not a vision for the Sussex Wildlife Trust. The focus of the Sussex Wildlife Trust is clearly Sussex wildlife, but we will have failed if we work alone. Much of our ambition can only be delivered by others and in virtually all areas we will have to work in extensive and highly positive partnerships. Working in partnership in a spirit of 'shared endeavour' will be a normal part of how we go about our work.

We want Sussex to be a home for nature's recovery, a place where wildlife and people can thrive together and where people demand their right to have access to nature and to the benefits of nature.

Carole Nicholson
Chairman, Sussex Wildlife Trust

How do we want to be remembered?

Decades of conservation action, protective policies, government commitments and unarguable scientific justifications for nature conservation have failed to turn the tide of wildlife loss at international, national and Sussex levels. There are positive conservation success stories, but these are small and isolated.

Furthermore, whilst there is an inescapable case for nature being at the root of health, wealth and well-being, modern society has separated people from their natural world. We have to 'go to' wildlife areas rather than wildlife being part of our everyday lives. Increasingly, the benefits from nature are unseen, undervalued and in decline.

Today wildlife might thrive in small, isolated areas but these, together, do not add up to a healthy wildlife-rich environment.

We know the natural world is in trouble. When future generations look back on this time they are bound to ask, having known this, what did we do about it? Against this background what legacy are we leaving to future generations, how will we wish to be remembered?

This document aims to share a vision with our partners. It is a vision of how we – all of us not just Sussex Wildlife Trust – want to be remembered:

We could be the generation who turned the tide, leaving a beautiful county with a rich living landscape and living sea. A Sussex with wildlife in ever greater numbers, species returning after an absence of many years. A Sussex with people young and old inspired by their connections with nature on their doorstep and further afield. What if the nightingale once again sang in every corner of Sussex, what if the red kite and marsh harrier once again graced our skies and the "boom" of bitterns was regularly heard from our reedbeds, what if a new generation of small children once again grew up fascinated by frogs, hedgehogs and butterflies in their gardens? At times it feels impossible, a pipe dream. How much better would we feel about ourselves and each other if we managed to make it happen?

Nightingale © Derek Middleton

Imagine...

...Being able to walk from your front door, maybe in a town or city, through attractive urban greenspace that stretches out to a thriving countryside extending for miles.

© Neil Fletcher

...Huge and exciting new wetlands, alive with wild birds, providing drinking water and holding back water which might otherwise flood our homes.

© Darin Smith

...Nature areas with flower-rich meadows, buzzing with insects that also pollinate our crops, and shady, inviting woodlands stretching to the horizon.

© Brian Jackson

...Recharging your batteries, away from the hustle and bustle of cities and towns, in vast areas of quiet countryside teaming with wildlife.

© Paul Hobson

...An environment that is wildlife-rich in every corner which is maintaining our climate, producing our food, providing vital services to us and replenishing our spirits.

© Nigel Symington

...Being in large, apparently wild areas; uninterrupted expanses of forests, glades and wetlands managed by natural processes rather than human intervention, where you can experience the full grandeur of nature.

This is not a luxury or a dream – but a necessity. An economic recession that lasted for decades would not be tolerated, yet we are in an environmental recession that has lasted far longer and has been far deeper. If our vision for nature and wellbeing in Sussex comes true, the time of ignoring environmental recession will have ended.

Section 1:
Our Vision

We want Sussex to be a home for nature's recovery. Where people and wildlife can thrive together and where people have access to the natural world and to the benefits of nature.

Living Landscape / Living Seas

At the core of our vision is a coherent and resilient ecological network – a network to make Sussex a truly Living Landscape. Plants and animals, and their habitats, will be stable or increasing and the conditions will be in place for this to continue for the foreseeable future.

Living Lightly

We take more from the natural world than it is able to provide without damage. Our vision can only be achieved if all sectors of society work together to reduce our ecological footprint and live sustainably – we need to live more lightly. It is vital that nature and the benefits from nature are central considerations in all decision making, with commitment, at all levels, to restore nature within a generation.

Living a Wild Life

Not only will an ecological network provide space for nature, it will also provide space for people, where the vital connection between people and their Wild Life will have been re-established. In our vision there will be access for all to wildlife and to the benefits from the natural world – with the majority of people in Sussex understanding nature, our place within nature, and taking action for nature.

In achieving our vision we will have restored something of the wild to Sussex. In a few special places we may be able to experience the full grandeur of nature and maybe gain a better insight into our own place in nature. The natural world will no longer be seen as something somewhere else – it will be seen as a birthright for children to be able to play outside in a wildlife-rich environment, local to their homes.

In Our Vision

1 Nature and the benefits from nature will have become central considerations in all decision making across Sussex.

2 We will have rebuilt the vital connection between people and the natural world; everyone will have connections with nature at whatever level captivates them.

3 The ecological footprint of our population will have been reduced to a level that does not create ecological debt to other places and does not cause the continual erosion of nature in Sussex.

4 A coherent and resilient ecological network will have been established, underpinning good ecological status of species and habitats in the county.

5 There will be parts of Sussex where we can experience something close to the full grandeur of nature.

What is the size of the challenge?

There is now wide awareness and strong evidence of our environmental challenges. Furthermore this has been the case since well before the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962. Yet, as a society, our achievements so far have simply not been up to the task.

In 2010 Professor Sir John Lawton was commissioned by government to assess our natural environment. A high-level advisory group was established by the previous Labour government and continued under the Conservative / Liberal coalition. It was a truly cross-party initiative securing full support from all three main political parties of the time. It was established to answer some critical questions: Have we got a coherent ecological network – have we got a network of wildlife sites that is capable of supporting our wildlife, supporting the benefits we get from nature and maintaining the natural systems that we rely on? Furthermore, can it continue to do this in the long term whilst at the same time responding and adapting to the challenges of climate change and other demands on our environment? The answers to these questions were 'no' – our wildlife sites are too small and too isolated to provide a healthy natural environment.

This conclusion is a reflection of environmental trends both here in Sussex and throughout the world. There are many good stories, and examples are given later in this document, but ***these successes just represent minor skirmishes in a war being lost on almost all fronts***.

Despite great conservation projects, often backed by legal protection and with over 13% of the World's land surface in protected areas, the general picture is of decline. For example: the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity states that the global species extinction rate is running around 1000 times greater than the expected background rate and about a quarter of all plant species in the world are considered to be in decline. The state of the art, international initiative entitled *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity* (TEEB) showed that around 60% of the World's ecosystems are degraded (Sukhdev, 2008). According to the government's then Chief Scientific Advisor, about 30% of UK ecosystem services are declining with many others existing in a reduced or degraded state (Watson & Albon, 2011).

"Most environmental trends, both globally and nationally, paint a picture of overall decline, particularly over the past 50 years. There have been some successes and improvements that illustrate what can be achieved but these are the exceptions. The ongoing loss of biodiversity, the degradation of ecosystems and the likely future impacts of demographic and climate change are of particular concern.

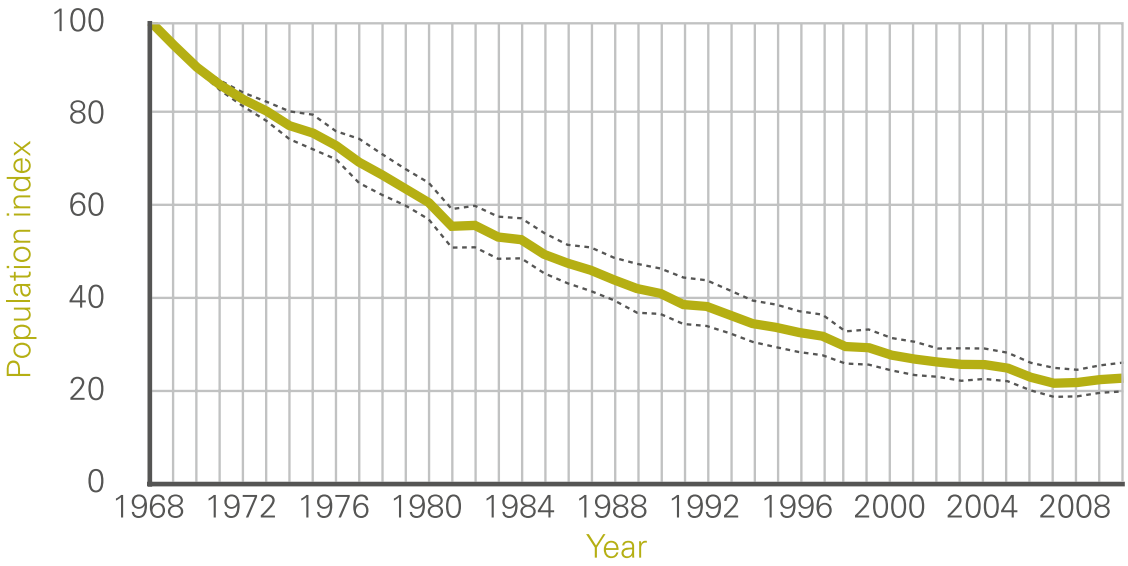
The evidence that exists indicates that the rate at which we are consuming our natural capital assets is unprecedented."

This was a conclusion from *The State of Natural Capital*, a high-level report commissioned by government (Helm, 2013).

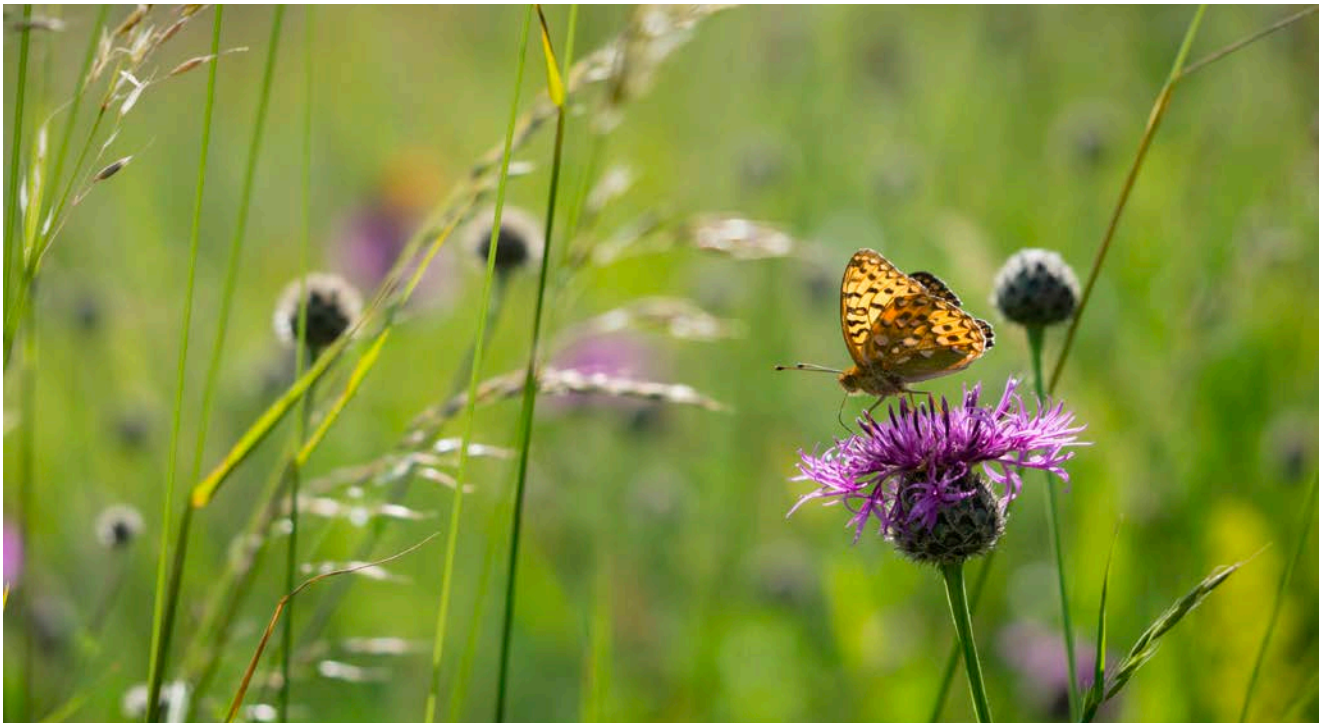
The State of Nature report for the UK (RSPB, 2013) shows 60% of flowering plants are in decline, with 31% decreasing strongly. Habitats have declined so much that, for example, only 2% of grasslands in England can now be considered flower-rich meadows.

This is illustrated by the 'Watchlist indicator' which shows what is happening to populations of about 150 priority animal and invertebrate species in the UK (for guidance a drop in index from 100 to 50 shows that the population has halved).

Watchlist indicator



Watchlist indicator showing the average population trend for 77 moths, 19 butterflies, 8 mammals and 51 birds listed as UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priorities. Species are weighed equally. The indicator starts at 100; a rise to 200 would show that, on average, the populations of indicator species have doubled, whereas if it dropped to 50 they would have halved. Dotted lines show the 95% confidence limits.



Dark green fritillary © Sue MacCallum-Stewart

What is happening in Sussex?

Heathland

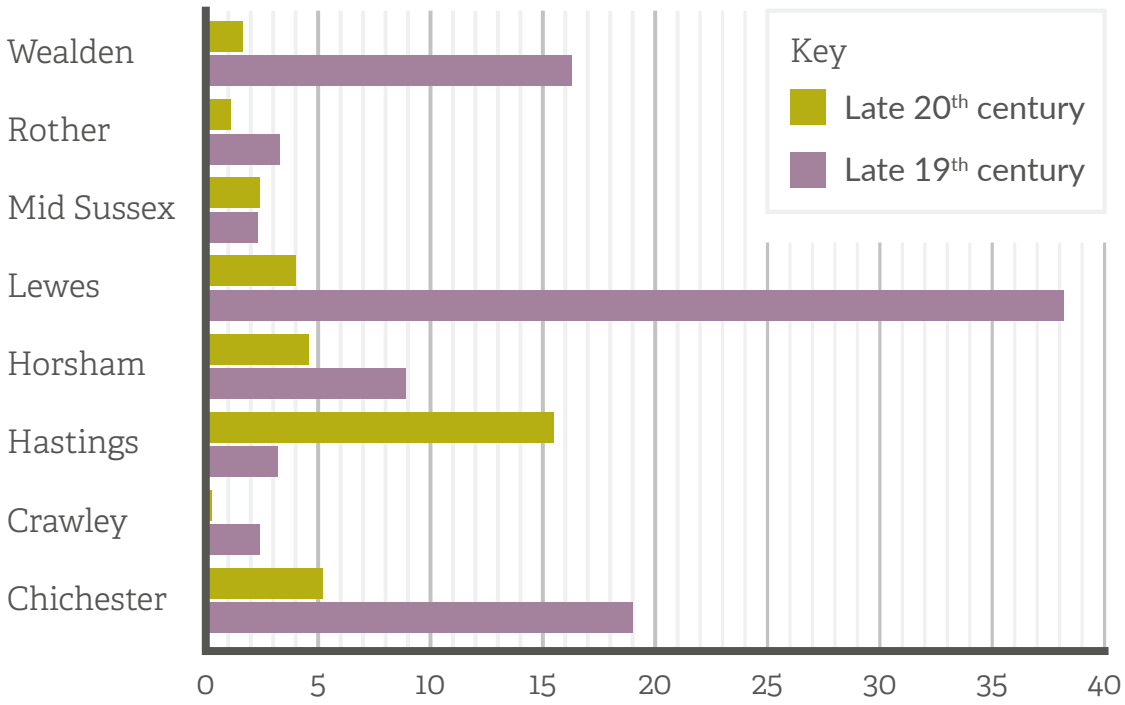
Examining trends on a Sussex scale starts to indicate how general trends at a national and international level can be better informed, and given a note of reality, by what is happening on the ground. A good example that might indicate some of these intricacies is provided by heathland.

Evidence held by the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre maps the distribution of heathland in the late 19th century and in the late 20th century. This data is regarded as being robust datasets which allow trends in the extent of Sussex heathland and in the size and distribution of habitat patches to be determined.

The data shows that heathland habitat has declined significantly following the general trend in the rest of the country (RSPB, 2013). So, for example, the total extent of heathland has decreased by approximately 70% during the period. As well as general habitat loss, however, we can also see local detail; for instance the average size of heathland patches – a proxy measure to indicate habitat fragmentation – has declined from 11.07ha to 2.44ha. The graph below illustrates this clearly. This shows the average patch size over 100 years ago (purple bar) and in the late 20th century (green bar).

Heathland is disappearing and being broken into smaller pieces.

Average heathland patch size (ha)



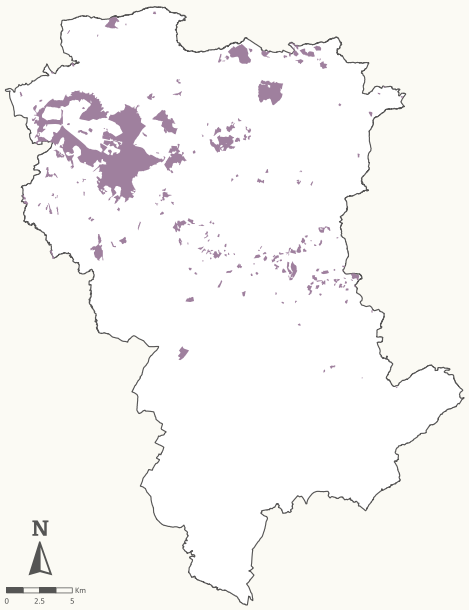
Case study

Then and now:

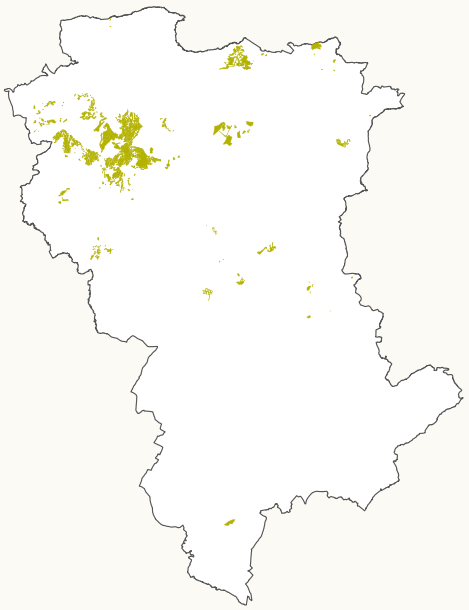
We can also see differences within Sussex. Wealden District has the largest area of heathland, predominantly in the Ashdown Forest area. Here, heathland has declined from 4,080ha (4.9% of the District) to 1,250ha (1.5%). Furthermore, the remaining heathland is significantly more fragmented, with more habitat patches (increased from 250 to 755) and the average patch size reduced from 16.3ha to 1.6ha over the past hundred years.

Below are two maps; the first of heathland in the Ashdown Forest area in the late 19th Century, the second is the same map about 100 years later:

Late 19th century



Late 20th century



Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre

Heathland datasets compiled by Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre and include contributions from other conservation organisations active within Sussex. This map contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2016. Sussex Wildlife Trust 100025883.

Local information can therefore add detail to generalities expressed at a national level. As well as overall trends for habitats we can see details of differences in patch sizes and connectivity. The heathland ecological network is effectively becoming more fragmented and less coherent.

The need for the nature conservation has never been clearer. We should never ignore or diminish the moral, ethical and spiritual reasons to conserve wildlife. And yet it is still vital to us for purely selfish reasons. Nature provides much of what we need for our health, wealth and well-being. In this respect, nature conservation is not a choice; it is a necessity from an informed self-interest perspective.

Decades of failure need to be turned around.

"The conservation of the planet is surely the ultimate essential – and yet it is seen as a luxury. Time and again it is non-governmental organisations, fired by the will of its members – by the will of the people, nothing less – that make the best kind of conservation happen."

Simon Barnes (2015)

How do we value nature?

We value the natural world for many reasons, from the simple enjoyment of being outdoors through to the practical benefits it gives us:

Its **intrinsic value** appeals to people's sense of moral rightness and the sense that nature has value in and of itself, which human beings have a duty to recognise and champion. We may appreciate nature functioning for itself, perhaps the highest form of value, as this recognises that nature can exist without us but we cannot exist without it. An appreciation of nature as being above the human sets the context for the more practical values.

Nature has a huge **emotional value**. Stunning views of blooming heather on a heath, expanses of bluebells in an ancient wood or the pleasure of hearing a nightingale singing stir great emotions in most of us. A child's wonder at first seeing a butterfly or holding a frog is not something that should be denied to anyone. These wonders are reflected in culture and literature – think of 'The Wind in The Willows' or the poems of Wordsworth.

Societal value encompasses all the practical benefit that nature brings to people in their daily lives. Contact with nature improves our health and wellbeing, we feel better when we are out in nature. We also receive direct benefits from nature, like an equitable climate, fresh air to breathe and clean water to drink. This represents the utilitarian value of nature to people, ultimately providing the necessities for human life.

Nature can also provide **financial value** resulting from goods (such as food and timber) and services (such as protection from flood, natural reduction of pollution and avoidance of drought). Some of these things can be bought and sold, though not all. For example, nature provides health benefits to people and this could be given a financial value. Nevertheless, health is not something that can be bought or sold!

These values are additive. For example, an ancient woodland in the Sussex Weald has a rich community of plants and animals that, effectively, cannot be replaced in any meaningful way and is of huge intrinsic value. This intrinsic value is enhanced by the historical meaning of an ancient wood and the way it contributes to sense of place. Views of bluebells and wood anemones stir positive emotions in us and we enjoy listening to nightingales or watching purple emperor butterflies. In addition, woods save us large amounts of money by storing carbon and slowing down flood waters in valleys (and timber also has value as a crop). A woodland's financial value does nothing to detract from its value as a spiritually and emotionally refreshing natural place.

Nature Matters because...

Intrinsic

It is... **priceless**; we should respect it for itself

Emotional

It is... **great**; we love it; it brings us joy

Societal

It is... **useful**; our wellbeing depends on it

Financial

It is... **productive**; it creates monetary wealth

Different people may emphasise one form of value over another. Some people may emphasise the moral rightness of nature conservation. Others may focus on the financial return from investment in nature.

A controversial global study by Costanza et al (1997) endeavoured to establish the financial value of all the services that nature provides. Whilst recognising that any figure was likely to be a gross underestimate, they came up with a figure far greater than the total Gross Domestic Product of the global economy at the time. More recently the United Nations Environment Programme (Nellermann, 2010) estimated the value of the benefits given to us by the World's ecosystems, from forests and freshwater to coral reefs and soils, to be over $73 Trillion, again far greater than the world gross national income. Even in economic terms (itself a very poor expression of value), nature has an almost infinite value, yet we attribute it virtually no value at all in our decisions.

However, economic value is a marginal part of the true value of nature. Nature is multi-purpose and multi-layered; all the different ways we value nature can be applied to the same place.

Nature really can provide a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts.

The need

We believe that progress towards our vision will be achieved if, working in partnership across all sectors of society, we address key, high-level ambitions for Sussex. These are presented in the following 5 sections:

Bringing nature's benefits to people

We rely on the natural world. Most of the benefits that make life both possible and worthwhile come from nature yet this is rarely recognised in economics or decision-making. This needs to be reversed so that the value of nature becomes central in all decision-making.

Ambition 1

In our vision, nature and the benefits from nature will have become central considerations in all decision-making across Sussex. All economic activity will be accounting for its environmental costs and nature will be fully considered in terms of the benefits it provides. A natural capital investment strategy will have been developed for the county, underpinning the implementation of a natural capital growth plan.

Our stock of natural assets – including geology, soil, air, water and all living things can be defined as **Natural Capital** (World Forum on Natural Capital). It is from this natural capital that we as humans derive a wide range of services, often called **ecosystem services** (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005), which make human life possible. These concepts are useful because they help frame our thinking about our connections with and reliance upon nature.

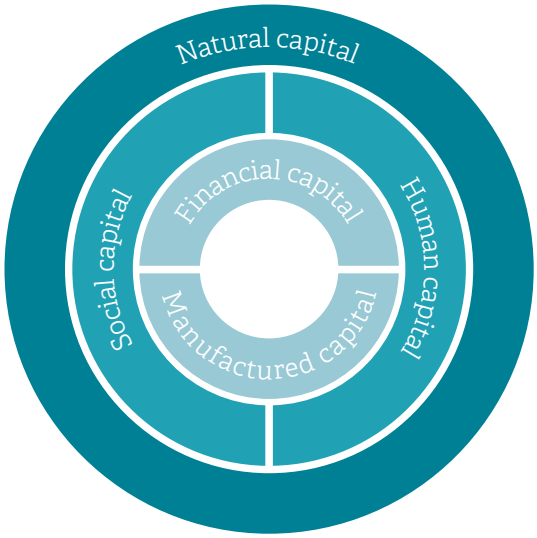
We might be used to the idea of 'capital', perhaps in terms of financial capital and the operation of business, and manufactured capital like buildings, for instance. It can be argued, however, that there are five forms of capital (Porritt, 2005) – human, social, manufactured, financial and natural capital (see page 16).

Kingfisher © Simon Booth

The UK National Ecosystem Assessment was a world-leading study involving around 500 experts looking at the state of UK ecosystems and the benefits they are providing to people. This study received cross party political support and fed directly into government policy. One of its key messages was:

"The natural world, its biodiversity and its constituent ecosystems are critically important to our wellbeing and economic prosperity, but are consistently undervalued in conventional economic analysis and decision making. Ecosystems and the services they deliver underpin our very existence. We depend on them to produce our food, regulate water supplies and climate, and break down waste products. We also value them in less obvious ways: contact with nature gives pleasure, provides recreation and is known to have a positive benefit on long-term health and happiness."

Watson & Albon, (2011)



Natural capital, however, is different to all other forms of capital:

Natural capital is the over-riding form of capital. All other forms rely on nature. If maintained at a sustainable level, natural capital is self-regenerating (woods can regrow themselves whereas factories cannot rebuild themselves). Natural capital, however, has thresholds and non-linear relationships which, if crossed can result in non-recoverable loss.

Much of our natural capital cannot be bought or sold, or cannot be transferred from one person to another – it is not tradable. If we sell, or destroy, natural capital (such as ancient woodland) in one place we may not be able to recreate it in another.

Some natural capital may be non-quantifiable. It may not be possible, or desirable, to attribute an economic value to all natural capital. What value a sunset, an orchid or a tonne of oxygen? However, where an economic value can be attributable (such as the pollination of crops) it shows that the true value of natural capital, in pure economic terms, is enormous albeit completely ignored in most economic calculations.

Case study

Upstream Thinking

Improving habitats in upper river catchments provides an example of how investment in nature can deliver extremely good return on investment, where these benefits can be quantified.

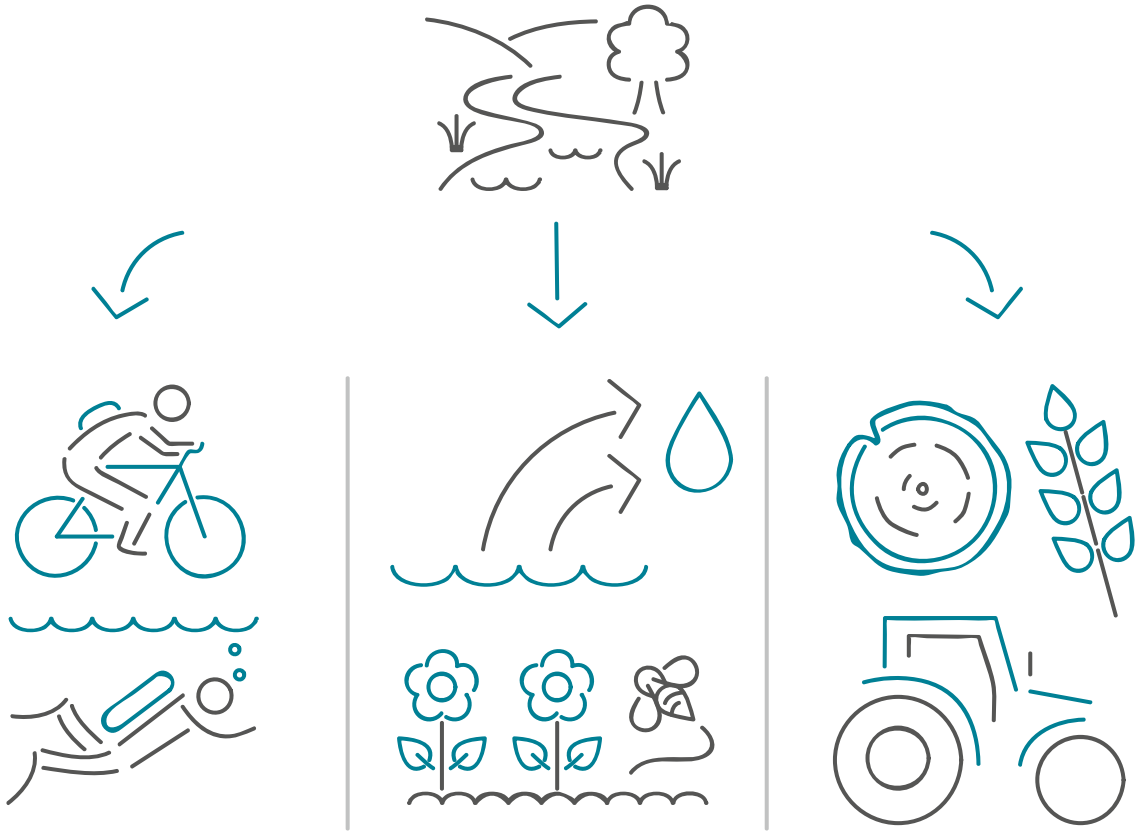
For example, the West Country Rivers Trust was set up to protect and improve the fresh waters in the south west of England. It works closely with farm businesses, helping them save money on chemical, water, waste and habitat management in ways simultaneously advantageous to river health.

This returns a 65:1 benefit-to-cost ratio! This is based on projected improvements to raw water quality and savings on treatment costs alone. There are also many co-benefits that may not be quantifiable or may not be measurable in financial terms. These include protection of biodiversity, including rare species and important salmonid fisheries, enhancement of the ecotourism resource, and security of the rural economy. Upstream Thinking is founded on understanding and protecting the functioning of catchment ecosystems as the basis for production of clean water and a range of co-benefits, and their intimate interactions with the practices and economics of working farms.

Similar projects are also being done in Sussex under the title of the 'Sussex Natural Flow Initiative'. Direct economic benefits here might also include reduced flood risk to vulnerable towns like Lewes, as well as savings to water companies because of improved water quality.


Woody dam © Sam Roberts

Supporting Services: A Living Landscape



Cultural Services | Regulating Services | Provisioning Services

An ecosystem is a dynamic complex of plants, animals and micro-organisms, and their non-living environment of soil, air and water, all interacting as a functional unit. **Ecosystem services** are the benefits that people obtain from ecosystems (Watson & Albon, 2011). These benefits from nature can be described in four groups:

- The non-material benefits we get like inspiration, tranquillity, cultural heritage, recreation and tourism are called **Cultural Services**
- **Regulating services** are natural processes like water purification, air quality, pollination, erosion control and flood regulation
- The products of ecosystems such as water, food and raw materials are referred to as **Provisioning Services**. The outputs of farming and forestry, for example, fall within this category although the activities of farming and forestry impact (both positively and negatively) on all ecosystem services
- All of these depend on the **Supporting Services** – the attributes of well-functioning ecosystems such as soil formation, nutrient cycling, water cycling and biodiversity

Before 2008 the idea of an act of parliament placing a legal requirement on the UK to bring its CO2 emissions under control as a contribution to addressing climate change seemed idealistic. But now we have a legally binding Climate Change Act. The wider natural environment is now, belatedly, at a similar cross-road. An act to turn around decades of environmental recession may seem a stretch, but it is no less needed and no less likely than a Climate Change Act might have felt in the early 21st century.

Leading environmental non-government organisations in the UK are now therefore calling for a Nature and Wellbeing Act (RSPB and The Wildlife Trusts). The elements in this are consistent with our vision, specifically:

- A statutory commitment to restore nature within a generation, with increasing biodiversity, more sites in good condition, sustainable management of natural capital and improvement in health and wellbeing from greater access and engagement with nature. This will be a high-order objective of all government policy requiring the right institutional framework to meet environmental goals across national and local government
- A requirement at national and local level, and a duty on all relevant authorities, to create an ecological network built at local level and knitted together across administrative boundaries. Networks should be woven into a wide range of local policy and investment decisions such as design and location of development, flood alleviation, preventative health delivery, education, recreation and job creation
- A requirement to access high quality expertise and information to enable regulators and proposers to plan and manage nature-positive development, infrastructure and other activities

© Miles Davies

Linking people and wildlife

One of the key problems of our times is that people have lost their links with the natural world. We must rebuild this connection.

Ambition 2

In our vision we will have rebuilt the vital connection between people and the natural world across Sussex; everyone will have connections with nature at whatever level captivates them.

Just as the evidence has built up to present an unarguable case for nature conservation, so has the connection between people and wildlife declined. Nevertheless, there is a strong intrinsic value in nature; even nature that we do not directly experience can still be viewed as highly important to us. We do not need to experience tropical rain forests or see a polar bear in order to care about them deeply. We may not even know of the ecological processes that result in us having oxygen to breathe but there is an obvious link with the natural world here whether we know it or not.

People are less likely to protect what they do not care about and they are more likely to care about things that they actually experience themselves. Furthermore, if you are inspired by a local butterfly, buzzard or badger, you are more likely to care about the plight of polar bears or endangered rain forests.

Our species has been on the planet for around 200,000 years. For the first 190,000 years we were hunter-gatherers and for all but the last 100 years most people lived a predominantly rural, agricultural existence. Thus around 99.9% of our evolutionary existence required us to be competent naturalists. Indeed there would probably have been a strong evolutionary pressure to take an interest in, and take pleasure from, the natural world.

"Only in the last moment in human history has the delusion arisen that people can flourish apart from the rest of the living world." **(Wilson, 1992)**

Case study

Disconnection with nature in children (The Wildlife Trusts, 2015):

- In 1915 children regularly roamed alone 6 miles from their homes. Today the average roaming range is just 300 yards and accompanied by adults
- Fewer than 1 in 10 children play in wild places, compared to almost half a generation ago (Natural England, 2009)
- 60% have never seen a peacock butterfly, 50% have never found frogspawn and 37% have never seen a hedgehog
- Less than 50% have been to a wild place to learn about wildlife in the last year
- Fewer than 10% play outside; when today's adults were children the figure was 40%
- Only 10% of children walk to school, in 1971 it was 80%
- 28% of children are overweight or obese and £713 million is spent on children's mental health disorders


© Emma Bradshaw

Our current disconnection is a temporary aberration. We have changed from an evolutionary situation in which we were active, existing in groups and fully integrated with nature, to one where we are inactive, often alone and disconnected from nature. It should not be surprising that this divergence from our evolutionary background has a significant impact on our physical and mental well-being.

Evidence of the impact of this break from our evolutionary needs is now extensive. For example studies show that where people are more exposed to nature this can lead to:

- lower blood pressure in dental patients
- fewer reports of ill health in prisoners
- increased self-discipline in children
- reduced mortality in elderly people
- significant improvements in children with Attention Deficit Disorder if they play in natural areas

One study showed a 10% increase in greenspace reduced health problems equivalent to a reduction in age of 5 years. There is lower job stress, higher job satisfaction and fewer illnesses in employees who have views of natural areas.

Much credible evidence shows that exposure to nature reduces anger and anxiety, sustains attention and interest, and enhances feelings of pleasure (Juniper, 2013).

E. O. Wilson (the father of the term 'biodiversity') refers to the essential link between people and wildlife as 'Biophilia' – the subconscious seeking of connections with the rest of life. It is reflected in the places we choose to live and visit, the fact that many of us like to have pets, when we shelter from sun we do so under trees not buildings, a large number of the populace backpacks, hunts, fishes, watches birds and visits gardens. Each year over 300 million visits are made to Forestry Commission woods in the UK, over 30 million visits to the South Downs National Park and about 300,000 visits to the famous Seven


© Miles Davies

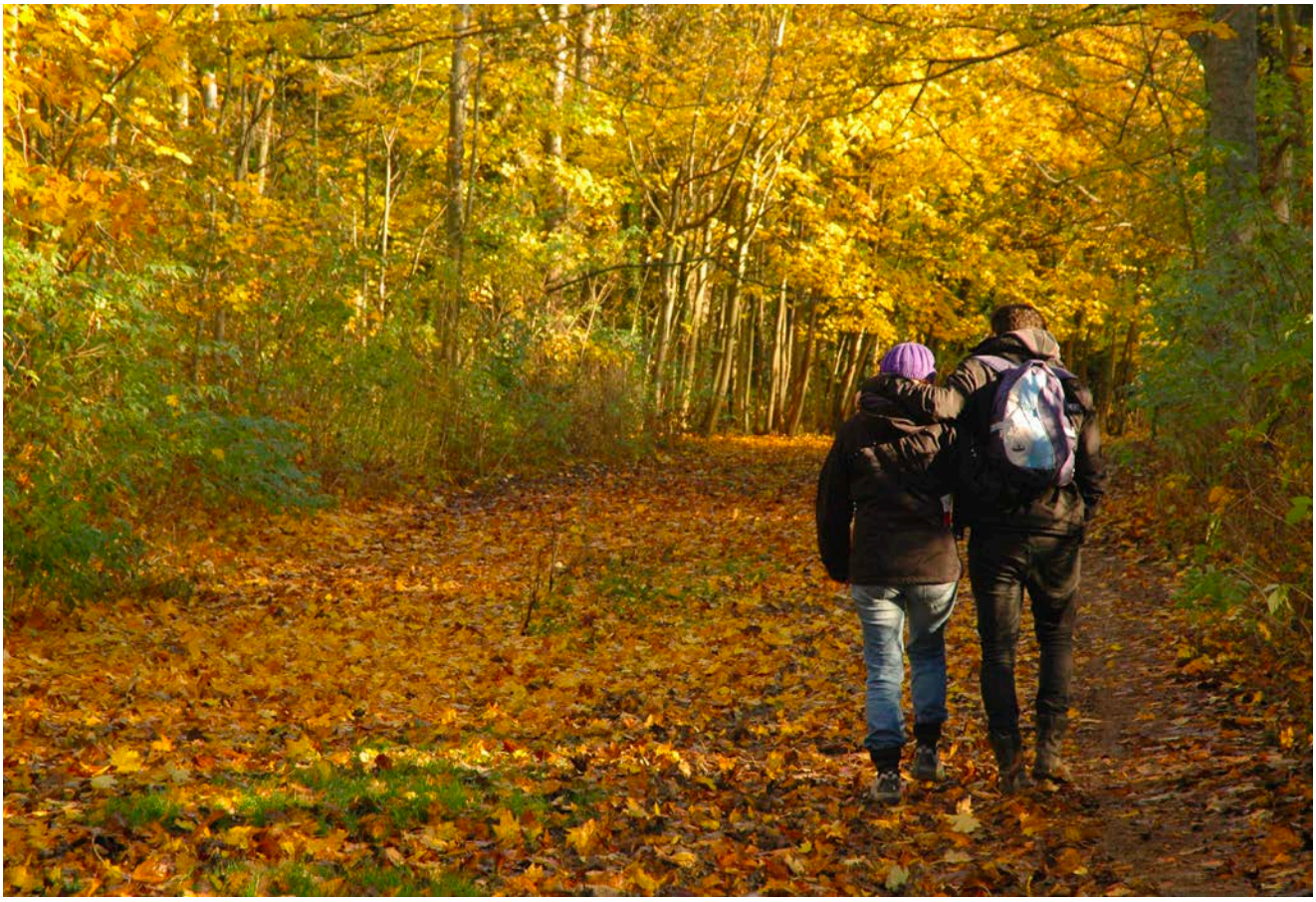
Sisters Country Park in Sussex. People travel for long distances to stroll along the seashore, for reasons they often can't put into words. This may show strong latent interests in nature but against this there are children in seaside towns who have never been to the seaside and most children today do not roam more than 300 yards from their homes.

Rebuilding the link between people and the natural world is one of the greatest requirements of our times. People have a right to connect with nature everywhere, from just outside their door, through urban greenspaces to managed countryside and ultimately to places they can go to appreciate the full grandeur of nature. This is not something that should be considered a luxury, a privilege or an activity reserved only for special places. It should be a right that people expect from a Living Landscape – an entire landscape providing for the needs of all.

Ways of achieving our ambition could be various, but below are a set of detailed targets which, if delivered, could achieve some progress (or indications of progress) towards this ambition:

- Every child in Sussex to spend half a day per week learning outside, in nature
- 70% of adults to spend leisure time in greenspace at least once a week
- 150,000 people (10% of the population) actively involved in the environment through volunteering, community activity or campaigning
- Public greenspaces will have public involvement in their management
- The benefits of outdoor activity in high quality greenspace to physical and mental wellbeing recognised and supported in policy and practice, for example in the NHS
- Re-wild our children: children have the right to be able to play outside freely in a wildlife-rich environment, local to their homes
- Everyone to have access to high quality, wildlife-rich greenspace:
  - People should be able to stroll to small greenspaces even within 200m of their home
  - Everyone should be able to have access to larger greenspace, maybe countryside sites, within 5km of their home
  - It should even be possible for everyone to enjoy large swathes of apparently wild landscape within 20km of their home

In our vision all organisations and groups will be working together to reveal the value of nature to people. People everywhere will be involved in caring for and rebuilding nature in their communities.



© Gemma Harding

Reducing threats to nature

Our way of life is eroding the natural world and reducing the benefits we get from nature. Reducing the ability of nature to support us is an unsustainable trend which we need to reverse.

Ambition 3

In our vision the ecological footprint of the population of Sussex will have been reduced to a level that does not create ecological debt to other places and does not cause the continual erosion of wildlife in Sussex.

The Regional Development Agency for the South East of England carried out a study, using standard techniques, to assess the amount of land each person in the South East of England required to support our life styles (SEEDA, 2000). On this basis we each need about 6ha of land. Sussex has a population of 1.6 million meaning that the population of Sussex requires an area of over 9.6 million hectares to support it. This is an area nearly 25 times the size of Sussex. This, of course, is not possible and only achieved for two reasons:

First we export many of our ecological problems

For example our direct water use is about 150 litres per person per day. This is barely achievable in a way that does not undermine the wetland wildlife of Sussex. If, however, we consider the amount of water that is needed to make or grow all the items we use every day then our water use goes up to about 2,500 litres per person per day. Most of these items come from abroad so the water to produce them also comes from abroad resulting in environmental damage to other countries. Thus we expect other countries to deliver the water that we demand and absorb the associated environmental damage for us. Add to that the pollution we produce and the resources we demand from elsewhere and it is clear that we are living with a huge ecological debt to other places.

Greenhouse gas emissions and climate change are another example of how we export our problems to the rest of the world.

Second we utilise land in Sussex in an unsustainable way

Our way of life means that we are eroding wildlife and disrupting natural processes in Sussex to temporarily support our current life styles. Furthermore, loss of wildlife is a helpful indicator for wider issues.

"Successive 'natural capital deficits' have built up a large natural capital debt and this is proving costly to our wellbeing and economy. If economic growth is to be sustained, natural capital has to be safeguarded." **(Helm, 2015)**

Our impact on wildlife from our way of life is a far broader issue than can be addressed by nature conservation organisations alone. All sectors of society, from businesses, to public bodies to individuals to the campaigning environmental NGOs should all be active in reversing this trend.

This is not, however, an impossible task. A key might be to break the negative link between prosperity and environmental damage. An example of this might have been provided for us by water use. The economy is probably twice as big now as it was in 1990. If water use was directly linked to economic activity then we would expect our water use to have doubled. In fact we use less water now than we did in 1990. A great achievement in itself but even greater as an indication of how economic activity can be decoupled from environmental damage.

Creating a Living Landscape and Living Seas

A thriving wildlife, the chance for people to connect with nature and enjoy the benefits of nature requires a coherent and resilient ecological network in Sussex.

Ambition 4

A coherent and resilient ecological network will have been established across Sussex, underpinning good ecological status of species and habitats in the county.

There have been successes over recent decades. For example the otter has now returned to Sussex and the black poplar tree has increased from just 34 individuals to many thousands. Also, sites that would otherwise have been lost have been protected. Amberley Wildbrooks was protected from drainage after a landmark conservation victory in the 1980s and 'Four Acre Wood' near Haywards Heath was protected from new housing by local people in 2006. Restoration of nature – growth in our natural capital – is certainly possible and there are many examples to illustrate the art of the possible.

Here are just three examples in Sussex of what can be achieved when interest, expertise and resources are focused in particular areas. Perhaps they give us a taste of things to come?

Case study

Wildlife recovery – The West Weald Landscape Partnership:

The Western Weald is one of the most well-wooded parts of lowland England. The area could be described as a forest matrix – it is in good ecological condition, habitats are well interconnected and much is well protected by statutory designations. It is a prime location where species such as the lesser spotted woodpecker, the wood white butterfly and woodland bats, that require a forest landscape, should do well. The SWT therefore established the West Weald Landscape Partnership – a project supported by a range of partners, landowners and local communities, aiming to improve the 'naturalness' of the area. One example of the success of the project is the Barbastelle bat, a rare woodland bat, protected by European law, which has a major roost site at Ebernoe Common, one of our nature reserves in the area. As a result of work done the population of this bat doubled in and around the Ebernoe area between 1998 and 2008. Other rare bats including Bechstein's and the recently discovered Alcathoe bat are thriving too.


Bechstein's bat © Hugh Clark FRPS

This shows that playing to an area's wildlife strengths, building partnerships, attracting investment and focusing resources can deliver direct environmental benefits.

Case study

The return of the wild – Knepp Estate

Knepp is a private estate, around 3,500 acres in size, where the owner has made great strides towards 're-wilding' his property. His approach has been to restore natural processes to the area and encourage nature to take its course. Forest regeneration has been encouraged, and grazing animals, such as cattle, deer, pigs and ponies, have been introduced as proxies for the wild grazing animals that might have existed in true wild areas. The river Adur has been re-naturalised by putting meanders back into a river that had been unnaturally straightened and deepened. The project is not 'objective-led', instead it aims to restore nature and see what emerges. And what has emerged has been incredible. Nightingale territories have increased from 9 to 31 in 10 years, it is now one of the strongest areas in Britain for purple emperor butterflies and the once locally extinct bird, the red kite, is now breeding there. A strong scientific approach is being taken; species and habitats are being monitored, ecosystem functionality followed and ecosystem services quantified. A truly world-leading example.

In this case a forward thinking landowner has focused scientific thinking on an area, developed his own partnership and used resources to rebuild an entire ecosystem. He has attracted investment and visitors to the area and has developed a viable alternative business model for the estate.

Purple Emperor © Derek Middleton

Case study

Discovery of an unknown asset – Chalk streams

Despite being internationally rare, previously no chalk streams in Sussex were recognized or protected. Sussex had an amazing natural asset and did not even know it. Working with national experts and in partnership with local landowners and other organisations we identified over 140 km of unique and internationally rare chalk streams, with their rare, associated species. Since then, this partnership has achieved an immense amount, protecting and restoring chalk streams for the future. They have now been nationally recognised in the UK Priority Rivers Map as important examples of unique chalk water headstreams.

Most people in Sussex drink water that derives from the chalk of the South Downs. The quality of these chalk streams is an excellent indicator of the quality of water that ends up as our drinking water. This project shows how identifying and caring for an important wildlife asset, as well as being of value in its own right, is an indicator of how we are looking after a key resource on which we all depend.

© FranSouthgate

A well-functioning Living Landscape and Living Seas supporting a thriving wildlife and underpinning the services that we need is within our grasp. However, we need to achieve this at a time when climate change is likely to impose unpredictable changes on any future environment, having unknown effects on plants and animals, their distribution and the way they group together to form communities or habitats. What would a plan for Living Landscape and Living Seas look like against the background of an unknown future?

Fortunately this is not an insurmountable problem. The natural world can adapt to an unknowable future, maintaining its structures and functions, if it is maintained in a healthy condition. This is the idea of creating resilience. Achieving this is, effectively, already within the central principles of nature conservation: conserve existing biodiversity, develop robust and varied landscapes, restore and create new habitat areas and improve connectivity and linkages for wildlife throughout the landscape.

The examples of positive nature conservation actions enhancing habitats, increasing species populations and improving benefits to people show us the way forward. At present these good examples are isolated. In our vision cases of wildlife gain are large and many, linking up to form a functioning and inspiring ecological network.

A coherent ecological network, as promoted by the government-commissioned committee led by Professor Lawton (Lawton et al, 2010), will underpin the favourable conservation status of Sussex species and habitats.

The conservation status of a Sussex habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and the area it covers within that range are increasing
- The species structure and functions which are necessary for its long term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable

The conservation status of a Sussex species will be taken as favourable when:

- It is at least maintaining itself in the long-term as a viable component of its natural habitats
- The natural range of the species is at least stable and preferably increasing for the foreseeable future
- There is, and will continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain and increase its populations on a long term basis

White tailed bumblebee © Mike Read

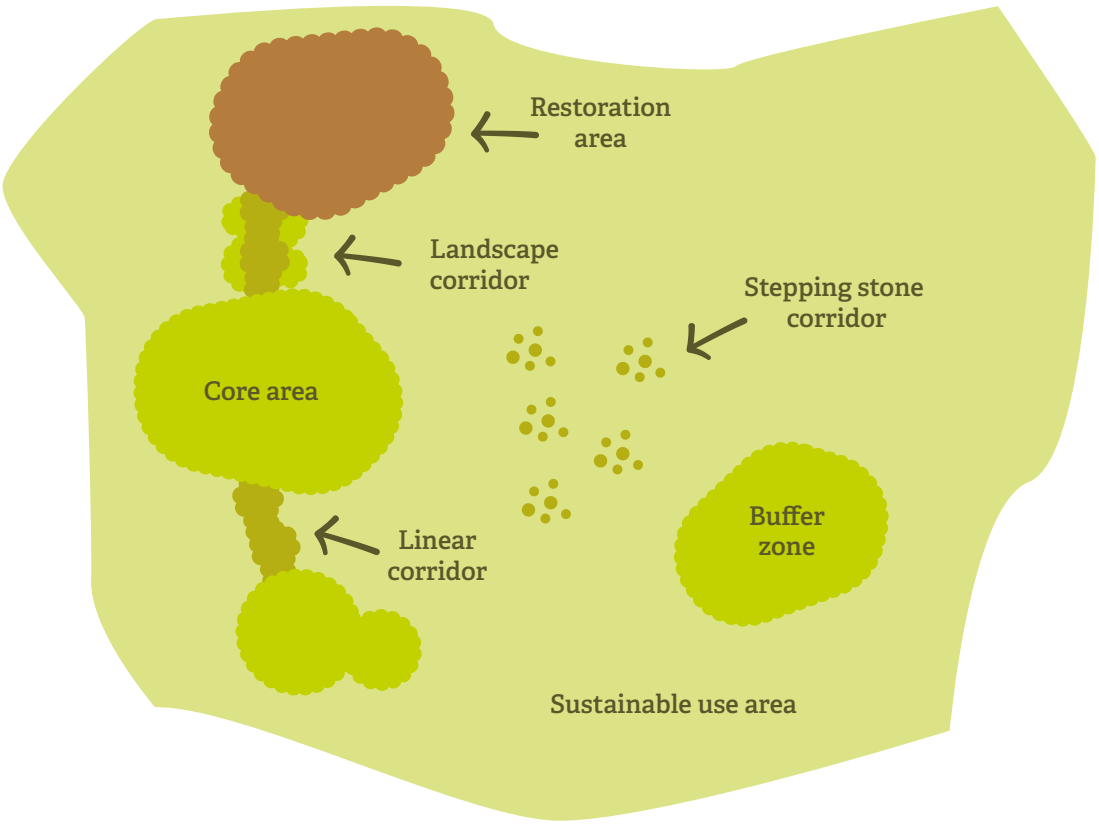
These principles, however, will be influenced by the impact of climate change. Species distributions will change and the way species come together to form communities and habitats could also be different in an unknown future. **Space** for nature therefore becomes important, even if we do not know exactly what form that nature might take.

A coherent ecological network must therefore provide the conditions needed for the conservation of our characteristic species at a landscape scale, support habitat continuity, support the ecological functioning of the whole landscape and deliver the ecosystem services on which we all depend. This is as relevant at a local, urban scale with familiar, common species as it is in large scale more natural areas deep in the countryside.

For example, a coherent ecological network should support viable populations of rare species such as the pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly. It should also support species that have an ecological function – for instance supporting viable populations of insects such as common bumblebees, which play such a vital role in pollinating plants in our gardens and in farmland.

A network must also support the ecological, physical and chemical processes that underpin ecosystem function. For instance a wetland, with all its wetland wildlife, needs a functional hydrological system – we can't have a wet meadow in a dry valley! And by supporting wetland functioning we gain ecosystem services such as water provision and flood risk reduction.

Ecological networks



By supporting ecosystem function, a coherent ecological network should provide a wide range of intrinsic value and ecosystem service benefits to people. A coherent ecological network is therefore fundamentally about providing the conditions in which people can thrive, as well as wildlife. **Space for nature will also provide space for people.**

This will consist of several components (Lawton *loc cit*):

- **Core areas** of high nature conservation value containing habitats that are important because of the wildlife they support and the ecosystem services they provide. They provide places from which plants and animals can disperse to other areas
- **Corridors** that improve the connectivity between core areas, enabling species to move either along linear, continuous habitats or by jumping small sites acting as 'stepping stones'. A mosaic that allows species to move is effectively an ecological corridor
- **Restoration areas** where new high value areas are created so that ecological functions and species populations can be restored, perhaps situated so as to complement, connect or enhance existing core areas
- **Buffer zones** around core areas, restoration areas, 'stepping stones' and corridors, to protect them from adverse impacts from the wider environment
- **Sustainable use areas** of natural resources and appropriate economic activities, together with the maintenance of ecosystem services making the wider landscape more permeable and less hostile to wildlife, including species that are dependent upon, or tolerant of, forms of agriculture

In summary the Lawton review concluded that in order to create a coherent and resilient ecological network across the whole of Sussex; in rural, urban and marine areas alike, we need **better, bigger, more and joined up** space for nature:

- **Better core areas:** maintaining and improving the quality of current wildlife areas is the first priority – sites with viable species populations, with high quality habitats and with better ecosystem functionality
- **Bigger individual sites:** greater habitat extent generally supports more species and is better able to support ecological and hydrological processes
- **More places for nature:** increasing quantity, the number of habitat patches, provides stepping stones to improve connectivity for dispersing species
- **Joined up with stepping stones, corridors and a permeable landscape:** increasing connectedness improves the general attractiveness of the landscape to wildlife, reducing risks of local extinction and improving the functioning of natural ecological processes

Doing this will ensure that the species and habitats of Sussex achieve good ecological status.

© Roger Wilmshurst

What would a coherent ecological network look like in Sussex?

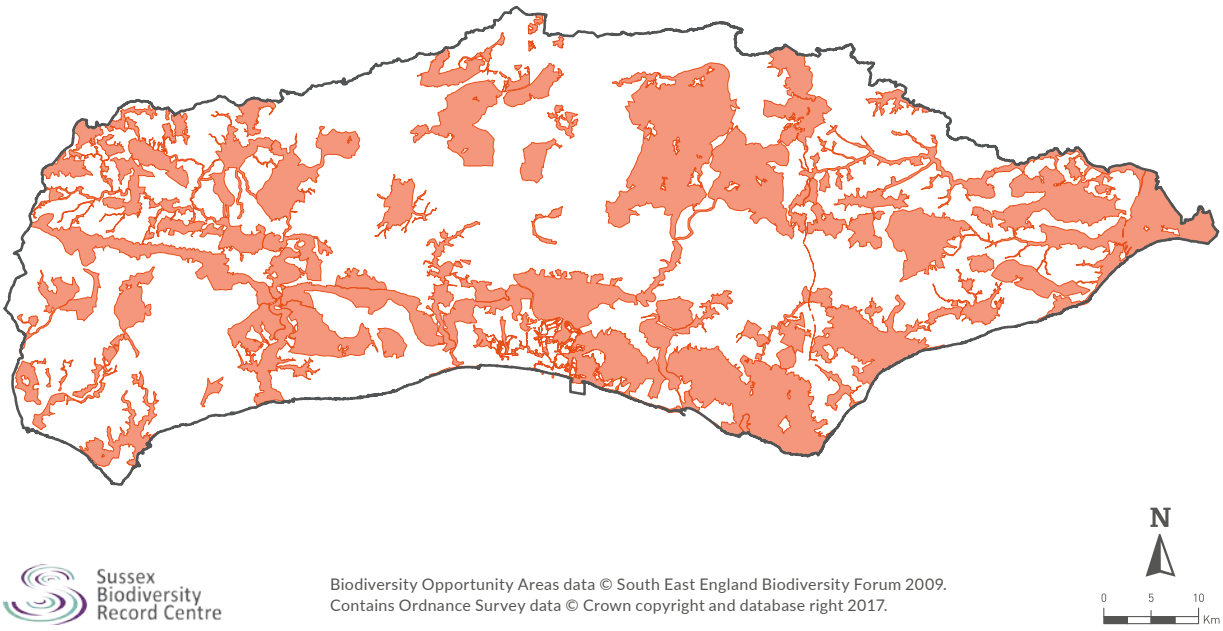
The first priority is to **look after and improve the management and condition of core areas**. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) cover 11.5% of the land surface of Sussex. Designated sites now cover 18% of the marine environment (following the recent designation of Marine Conservation Zones). Managing these to the highest standards is the first priority. These are the key areas from which restoration of the natural environment can spread.

We must then **plan an ecological network across Sussex based** on the core areas (above) and the areas of greatest opportunity for enhancing the ecological status of Sussex. The basic building block for this is the map of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA) for Sussex. This was developed about 10 years ago and has stood the test of time.

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in Sussex

These essentially form the framework of a county-level ecological network. Superimposed on this should be some consideration of connectivity between these large areas and landscape-scale initiatives (such as river catchment projects) that work at a still larger scale. The resulting map represents the most cost-effective broad areas, on a Sussex scale, in which to deliver major ecosystem restoration. An ecological network, however, is a concept rather than a single map, and can be applied at all scales: at county, river catchment, district, neighbourhood and individual landowner levels.

Sussex Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA)



Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas data © South East England Biodiversity Forum 2009.
Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2017.

Case study

Sussex River catchments and wetlands *provide an illustration of the value of considering Sussex in terms of an ecological network.*

Hydrology – the way water influences and is influenced by the wider environment – is a key ecological process shaping our landscape, determining the quality of wildlife and underpinning ecosystem services. The current extent of wetland in Sussex is, however, just a tiny fraction of its historic extent. Human impacts on hydrology – urbanisation, engineering of watercourses, drainage of wetlands, pollution and overuse of water have had an impact on wetlands. This is reducing the ability of our wetlands to provide us with ecosystem services.

Sussex river catchments are therefore a case where we should create a functioning ecological network. Overall we need a far higher ambition for our water environment.

We should be making catchments as natural as possible: restoring natural processes to rivers, restoring the hydrology to our wetlands and re-wetting drained or dry habitats (wet heaths, wet woodlands, dry marshland etc). In doing so we should, for example, be returning over 80% of our rivers to good ecological status (less than 20% reach this currently). We should establish wetland mosaics at least 250ha in size in all our major river catchments – with at least one 'wild' wetland area over 50ha in size – with natural processes and natural hydrology restored on each river catchment. Reedbeds, fens, grazing marshes, wet woodlands and other wetland habitats should all be restored from headstreams to the coast in sinuous, varied channels with more naturally functioning hydrology.


© Nigelsy Mington

Putting the 'wild' back into wildlife

No part of Sussex can truly be described as wild. This has been the case for many centuries. There should, however, be special places where we can go to experience at least some small taste of wild nature.

Ambition 5

There will be parts of Sussex where we can experience something close to the full grandeur of nature:

- At least one significant block of near-naturally functioning wild forest will have been developed in the Weald of Sussex
- Natural processes will have been restored to all river catchments in Sussex, with all catchments containing at least one large near-naturally functioning wetland
- 'Keystone' species – those that do a significant ecological job in the environment – will have been returned to Sussex

All areas have, to some extent, been modified by the actions of people. Indeed this interaction is so well established that habitats are best described as 'semi-natural', not natural. Management has determined the species composition and structure of all habitats in Sussex.

Nevertheless, it is also true that nowhere can be described as 'artificial'. Natural processes also impact on the whole Sussex landscape. The water cycle, mineral cycling, the growth of plants and animals and interactions between species and habitats are all natural processes taking place alongside management by people. **The idea that we have total control of the natural world is an illusion – but so is wilderness.**

Nature can, however, exist without people. We may need to control nature for our own purposes, such as in farming and forestry. However, this must be counterbalanced by an approach that aims to understand nature and work with it. Leaving nature alone is abandonment, but restoring natural processes is re-naturalisation – a return of some elements of the wild. Because we have interfered so much, and have become such a dominant force, we now have to take responsibility to help nature recover. Managing nature and working with nature can work side by side.

Golden ringed dragonfly © Toby Houlton

It could even be argued that there are two opposing philosophies in nature conservation:


© Sam Roberts

On one hand is the concept of careful stewardship. In the highly managed landscape of Sussex we may think we have control of nature. From an ethical standpoint, and for the benefits nature provides, we are responsible for the stewardship and sustainable management of the nature in our care. This philosophy gives rise to an objective or target-driven approach to conservation – we manage nature for outcomes such as species, habitats or services like food or timber.


© David Plummer

On the other hand is the idea that there is a natural system of which we are a part. We should aim to understand nature and natural processes, working with nature rather than insisting on total control. Nature has the ability to surprise us. We do not know what we are going to get, see or experience. We are not in total control. We might therefore see ourselves as part of a system, not its master. This philosophy gives rise to a process or emergence-driven approach to conservation. By looking after the system we may try to set natural processes going and then, within limits of acceptability, see what emerges.

Each philosophy, in isolation, has weaknesses. With the first, the idea of total control is an illusion. Taken too far it can result in a view of nature only existing as a human whim. If it only exists as a whim then it can be discarded as a whim. With the second we literally do not know what we mean; it has been millennia since nature was truly wild and the relevance to current landscapes is unclear. We might believe that as we cannot control nature it is not our responsibility so it is not even worth trying.

Running as parallel philosophies, however, each can add strength to the other. If we understand a little more about how natural processes work in a more natural situation then this could inform how we manage landscapes to get most benefit. Careful stewardship to provide benefits to humans conversely provides strength to supporting a functioning nature that delivers ecosystem services.

Twenty years ago there was nowhere in Sussex where we could go to experience the full grandeur of nature. This is still the case. However, our nature reserves at The Mens and Ebernoe Common function more through natural processes than they do through human intervention. These are just two sites in the wider West Weald Landscape, an area that could be described as a forest matrix; not wild, but wilder than most landscapes. Furthermore the Knepp estate is going through a process of deliberate re-wilding; restoring key elements of natural processes to 3,500 acres of lowland England. Large areas where we can experience something close to the full grandeur of nature may sound something of a stretch, but these examples show how we could be on the way to achieving just that.

The Sussex landscape will remain a predominantly managed landscape for the foreseeable future. Modifying this to benefit wildlife will therefore be the normal route to nature conservation in Sussex. This will be objective-led where key features are recognised and conserved. This is a necessary but reductionist approach where we are forced to look after the pieces rather than rebuild the system. However, so long as we are guided by the principles of better, bigger, more and joined, we can ensure that each of the pieces is playing a positive role in restoring living landscapes and living seas.

An alternative approach would be where restoration, enhancement and expansion are promoted by rebuilding the whole picture alongside protecting the fragments. In these areas, natural processes like flooding, natural disturbance and naturalistic grazing alongside the regeneration and growth of trees will be allowed to take their own course rather than bend to the will of conservation management. This is the approach for a dynamic, positive and expansive form of nature conservation which can only be achieved in low-risk areas where there is sufficient scale and diversity for natural processes to create a spectrum of habitats.

There may even be arguments for the reintroduction of lost species to our landscape. Most important are the 'keystone species'; species that do an important ecological job. Beavers are a good example – they are nature's ecosystem engineers, reshaping river valleys and restoring hydrological systems. Evidence indicates that this would drive ecosystem function and be a major contributor to ecosystem services; water quality, flood risk, erosion control, even fish populations are all positively impacted by the return of the beaver. Perhaps the most significant keystone species to consider in Sussex will be the beaver; another might be the pine marten. This would restore the 'ecology of fear' to grey squirrels; fear of predation affecting their population and reducing their damaging impact on woodland ecology. It may even be worth considering restoring nature's deer-grazing control mechanism – the lynx!

Truly wild nature will never be achieved in Sussex; everywhere is impacted to some extent by people. However, it should be possible to increase the use of natural processes and so rely less on management. This will, however, be a sliding scale of less to more management. Our most wild system is (or should be) the marine environment. But even small urban greenspaces could generate and appreciate a sense of wildness by encouraging nature to look after itself.

Moving forward

Decades of conservation action, protective policies, government commitments and unarguable scientific justifications for conservation have failed to turn the tide of ecological loss at international, national and Sussex levels. Our ambition for Sussex is to turn this around. This document presents a vision that we wish to share with partners to make Sussex a place where wildlife and people can thrive.

We do not own Sussex, we rent it from our children on a full repairing lease – we need to start repairing!

We see a Sussex with a coherent ecological network, where people are connected to nature and where the benefits of nature are fully realised and incorporated into decision-making.

Learning from successes of the past, we see the clue for turning wildlife loss into wildlife restoration is in how we concentrate effort in areas of greatest opportunity. This will be a principle that we will carry forward into the strategy for the Sussex Wildlife Trust, in particular regarding the enhancement of existing, and formation of new, partnerships.

© Miles Davies

Section 2:

Sussex Wildlife Trust Strategy

© Paul Naylor

Our Vision for Sussex in the next 50 years:

We want Sussex to be a home for nature's recovery. Where people and wildlife can thrive together and where people have access to the natural world and to the benefits of nature. This will be achieved through:

Living Landscape / Living Seas

A coherent and resilient ecological network to underpin the good ecological status of Sussex.

Living lightly

Sustainable development – our vision can only be achieved if all sectors of society work together to reduce our ecological footprint. Nature and the benefits from nature must be central considerations in all decision-making, with commitment, at all levels, to restore nature within a generation.

Living a Wild Life

Access for all to wildlife and to the benefits from the natural world – re-establishing the link between people and their Wild Life. The majority of people in Sussex will understand nature, our place within nature, and taking action for nature.

The purpose of this strategy is to describe an approach for the Sussex Wildlife Trust that contributes to reversing the decline in wildlife over previous decades.

What works for Sussex wildlife?

With a few notable exceptions, nature continues to be in significant decline. A major cause of this is that, at a political, societal and individual level, society attaches little or no value to nature and people are increasingly disconnected from nature. As a result nature is barely considered in decision-making. These elements are inextricably linked – they are one problem.

However, a general decline in nature and people's connection with nature is counteracted by good specific examples that buck the trend. There are places where nature is increasing, the value of nature is being recognised and people's connectedness with nature is improving. In these cases we have focused resources; working in partnership, we have identified areas of opportunity to improve the landscape and marine environment for wildlife and people. This is what Living Landscapes means: working together to create landscapes where wildlife and wild places are thriving and interconnected and where people themselves value and are connected to nature.

What we are going to do – more of what works. Working in partnership, we aim to inspire, influence and enable others to make nature-positive change. We will continue to act strategically on genuinely county-wide or national challenges and alongside this **we will commit wholeheartedly to the Living Landscape and Living Seas approach**. In so doing we will pursue a culture of holistic working across the organisation. This will require us to **focus resources across all areas of delivery on Living Landscape areas**, on land (including urban areas) and in the sea, where we have identified opportunities for making the greatest difference to wildlife and people's connectedness with nature.

A framework forming the background to our strategy:

Benefits of our approach: We will know that we have succeeded when, in a Living landscape area:

- our reserves team has expertly managed our nature reserves, inspiring others and helping others with conservation delivery services (such as grazing)
- our landowner advisors achieve nature-positive management across the wider landscape
- our education team is working with all the local schools
- the community team has established groups of local people to take action for wildlife
- our membership and communications team is raising awareness of wildlife and the Trust
- the advocacy team is the outstanding voice for wildlife in the area
- decisions are based on state of the art ecological information from the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre and our ecological knowledge base
- we are recognised for the provision of the highest quality experience to our members, supporters, volunteers and our different external relationships

As a result good practice will spread out from our Living Landscape and Living Seas areas and, across Sussex, nature shifts from decline to recovery and more people are inspired by nature, act for nature and are involved with the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

Context

The Sussex Wildlife Trust strategy is impacted by the wider social and political context that will affect our work on a foreseeable timescale of approximately 5 years.

Threats

We are in a period of poor political recognition of the value of nature, reducing investment in nature and threats of reducing environmental regulation. The economic climate is often skewed towards investment in activities that are damaging to nature whilst controls to reduce this impact are weakening. A changing regulatory framework around the future of the European Union could also be detrimental to nature. Reduced funding for the environment can mean reducing environmental delivery by others. An effect of this is increased expectations on charities whilst charity funding is reducing and competition is increasing. This can put pressure on partnership working, with charities at risk of becoming more insular in response to resourcing stress. We risk being in competition for membership and funding rather than focusing as allies on the conservation of nature.

Opportunities

Countering these problems is an increasing recognition of the value of nature through ecosystem service assessment and natural capital evaluation, and this is increasingly appearing in policy and in some business decisions. Extreme events (eg floods and climate change) have stimulated some popular discussion about the benefits of well-functioning ecosystems and a potential to re-internalise the value of nature into economic (and other) decision making. Sussex Wildlife Trust is in a good position to respond to these opportunities. We have over 30,000 members who are loyal to the Trust (lapse rate is low). We also have a history of working very effectively in partnership with other organisations in order to deliver nature conservation and we are increasing our influence in wider agendas (for instance health and wellbeing). We may be able to increase engagement through people


Common frog © Dave Kilbey

and wildlife projects and potentially through new visitor centres. Our nature reserves, projects, strong policy influence background and scientific evidence base enable us to build a strong case for nature.

Response

Caring for wildlife, promoting the benefits of nature and reconnecting people to nature remain central to our philosophy. Dwindling resources affecting all organisations emphasises the need to form strong partnerships so working with others will be a major arm in our delivery. We work alongside many partners. At one end of the spectrum are the campaigning, perhaps outspoken, NGOs; at the other are government agencies who are more constrained. Some partners focus on science and biological recording while others on practical conservation activities. Some local groups focus on specific wildlife sites; others on social goals and community activity.

Each organisation has its own niche and we will recognise our own particular niche in the context of our partners. ***This is often in the middle ground between many of our partners. We are local, but tuned to national issues. We carry out direct conservation action and also engage people with nature. We are strongly scientific, but also inspire with stories. We make a strong nature conservation case but are not as outspoken as the campaigning NGOs or as constrained as government bodies.***

Nevertheless, whilst maintaining the overarching need to be vital allies in the conservation of nature, we do need to recognise that partners might be competitors in some areas. We will not allow this to diminish our relationships.

Our delivery principles: Focusing resources on specific areas

These will be Living Landscape areas which can deliver best for nature, best for access to nature and best for nature's benefits.

Better, Bigger, More and Joined

For wildlife this means:

- **Better core areas:** maintaining and improving the quality of wildlife areas, as the first priority
- **Bigger individual sites:** increasing habitat extent supporting more species
- **More places for nature:** increasing the number of habitat patches for wildlife
- **Joined up with stepping stones and corridors:** increasing connectedness and wildlife movement through a landscape

Creating a coherent ecological network in which wildlife thrives.

For people connecting to and valuing nature this means:

- **Better core areas:** improving the quality of experience with nature and deepening engagement
- **Bigger individual sites:** enabling better delivery of the benefits of nature
- **More places for nature:** increasing the ability to connect with nature and to experience benefits from nature
- **Joined up with stepping stones and corridors:** so connectivity with wildlife extends throughout the landscape, making wildlife part of people's everyday lives

Creating a coherent ecological network that provides the ecosystem services on which we depend.

Focus areas:

Sussex Wildlife Trust activity will be focused at three levels:

1. **Sussex-wide** – We will act throughout Sussex on county-wide challenges
2. **Living Landscape areas** – Where we focus some of our activity
3. **Target areas** – Where we will integrate all areas of our delivery

How we choose focus areas

Selection of focus areas, whether 'target areas' where we focus some of our activity or 'nature hubs' where we focus all areas of activity will be informed by a range of criteria particularly looking at areas of greatest opportunity for biodiversity (Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and Marine Protected Areas). Alongside this will be considerations of practical conservation activity, such as conservation grazing focused on nature reserves, community action focused on engagement opportunities and Living Landscape projects focused on land management. Community campaigns focused on areas of environmental concern could also affect area choice and all target areas could be used to help improve membership recruitment.

Our ambitions and how we will organise our work

Themes

Advocacy – persuasion & influence

Working alongside other organisations and individuals to act as a voice for nature, arguing for nature-positive change at a political, organisational, societal and individual level.

Direct impact

Delivering nature-positive change in projects (such as education) and areas (such as nature reserves) over which we have direct control.

Facilitating change

Working alongside others (such as landowners), forming projects (such as in education and community work) and forging partnerships to enable nature-positive change on land and sea.

Information, knowledge and evidence

Gaining information, building knowledge and amassing evidence to support the care of nature and the building of natural capital.

The Mens © Nigel Symington

Outcome (Groups)

A coherent ecological network	People inspired by, connected to, and valuing nature	A leading wildlife organisation in Sussex

20 year Outcomes / Ambitions for the Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT):

Proxy measures that we believe will give an indication of progress towards the achievement of our key Outcome Groups.

15% of Sussex is 'designated' for nature conservation

We will ensure our ecological network plans are embedded into all 14 Sussex local plans and all neighbourhood plans in SWT Living Landscape areas

10 Living Landscape projects covering approx. 30% of Sussex in which we will be working towards an evidence-based ecological network

All SWT nature reserves to meet good ecological status

Land actively managed by SWT will increase from about 2,000 ha to 8,000 ha

We will engage landowners in nature sensitive land management on 70,000 ha

All Sussex Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) will be in positive management

We will produce 5-yearly 'State of Nature in Sussex' assessments to detect change and inform future actions and priorities

We will develop, test and promote more effective mitigation and compensation for wildlife damage linked to strategic developments in Sussex

We will develop / implement plans to reintroduce species and control non-native invasive species, particularly in Nature Hubs

We will facilitate contact with nature for over 100,000 school children annually (increasing from around 20,000 in 2015)

Local communities (and in particular schools) will have an active relationship with each of our nature reserves

60% of schools within our Living Landscape project areas will have repeat engagement with SWT

A community nature reserve will be set up for every town / city with a population of 20,000 or more

We will have 5 'rural' visitor centres that will engage with over 750,000 visitors every year

We will manage and support 2000 active volunteers for SWT and have links with an environmental volunteering network of over 10,000 people / 100 community conservation groups

5% of the population of Sussex will be members of SWT (currently 1.7%)

An additional 5% of the population of Sussex will be affiliated supporters of SWT

SxBRC will hold over 10m species records

We will have 2 urban visitor centres (in areas with over 100,000 population)

We will ensure we are a leading influence within every relevant strategic forum in Sussex

SWT is seen and recognised by 50% of the population of Sussex annually (800,000 people)

We will develop a robust people strategy to ensure that everybody involved with the Trust understands how their contribution supports the delivery of the Vision

© Miles Davies

A coherent ecological network	People inspired by, connected to, and valuing nature	A leading wildlife organisation in Sussex

Over the next 5 years the Sussex Wildlife Trust will deliver progress towards these outcomes:

Prioritise and work in 4 hub areas	Train 100 teachers p.a. in Forest School, Wild Beach, Outdoor Practitioner courses	Membership of SWT will rise from 1.7% to 3% of the Sussex population
All SWT nature reserves to meet good ecological status	Educational activity with 20 local schools on SWT reserves	1% additional affiliated supporters of SWT (15,000 people)
Actively manage 3,000 ha of land	Work with 70 schools a year through outreach programme, targeting Living Landscape areas	Biological records in the SxBRC will rise from 4m to 7m
Engage landowners in targeted areas over 20,000 ha	SWT will have 3 community nature reserves	1 urban visitor centre
6 Sussex MCZs will have adopted management plans	2 'rural' visitor centres	We will be active members within every relevant strategic forum in Sussex
Ecological network plans are embedded in all Sussex Local and Neighbourhood plans in SWT Living Landscape areas	750 active volunteers and network of 50 associated groups	25% of Sussex population see and recognise SWT annually
A 20 year plan for the development of the Sussex Ecological network	Delivering wellbeing programs in 5 locations across Sussex	We will maintain high-quality recruitment and development opportunities to ensure that we attract and retain the right staff and volunteers across all areas of our activity
Prepare first quinquennial State of Nature review		

Grey seal © Paul Naylor

Appendix 1.

The objectives of Sussex Wildlife Trust, according to our *Articles of Association* (2013)

The objectives of the Trust are:

1. To conserve the Sussex land, seascape, its wildlife and habitats for the public benefit
2. To survey, monitor, record and study, for the benefit of the public, sites areas and habitats of botanical zoological and geological or other scientific interest or of natural beauty or of landscape value, to protect them from ill treatment, degradation or destruction and to improve their quality
3. To establish, promote, maintain and manage wildlife sanctuaries or nature reserves or marine conservation areas for the conservation of flora and fauna and features of geological interest and so far is compatible with this objective, permit public access to them
4. To encourage the breeding of flora and fauna which are interesting or threatened
5. To promote study and research for the advancement of knowledge in the natural sciences and biodiversity and to publish the results of that research
6. To educate and encourage the public in an understanding of the natural history and wildlife of Sussex
7. To promote good practice in furtherance of sustainable development and biodiversity

Mistle thrush with young © Derek Middleton

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