**Wilder Horsham District**

**June 2020**

**Delivering a Nature Recovery Network for Horsham District.**

**Background**

The *Wilder Horsham District* (WHD) partnership between Horsham District Council and Sussex Wildlife Trust is new and the first of its kind in the South East Region. The five year project has three strands:

1. **Resilient organisation:** Making a commitment to wildlife and the natural environment has to start at an organisational level. This will make sure that all tiers of decision making are sharing the ambitions of a *Wilder Horsham District*. Organisational resilience means ensuring that the principles of the program are embedded throughout the Council. **SWT Team involvement:** This work will span across SWT departments, and be co-ordinated through the WHD Steering Group with the WHD Community Support Officer providing the administrative support.
2. **Resilient Landscape:** There are already partnerships and projects in the District working to enhance biodiversity at a landscape scale in rural and urban environments. WHD will collaborate with these to add value, to existing ambitions as well as developing its own relationships and programs of activity. Proxy measures will be used to monitor the creation of the Nature Recovery Network (NRN[[1]](#footnote-1)) once these have been mapped for Horsham District.

**SWT Team involvement:** This work will be led by the WHD Landowner Advisor. They will have support from the wider SWT team and WHD Steering Group in developing the vision for the WHD NRN[[2]](#footnote-2). The WHD Landowner Advisor will be line managed by SWTs Wilder Landscapes Officer. The WHD Community Support Officer (Managed by the Landowner Advisor) will provide administrative and mapping support for this work.

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| Small interventions on areas 1 to 3 hectares | These interventions will be managed by the relevant landowner/manager, supported by the WHD Landowner Advisor, with or without support from partner organisations. |
| Medium scale interventions 3 to20 hectares | These interventions will be managed by the relevant landowner/manager, supported by the WHD Landowner Advisor, with or without support from partner organisations. The Wilder Landscape Officer will provide advice. |
| Larger interventions 20 ha plus | As above unless the opportunities presented fit into the remit of the Wilder Landscape Officer - e.g. Potential Beaver reintroduction, largescale rewilding opportunities or ambitious restoration of natural processes. |

Work on HDC’s own estate is a key part of this work and relationships are in place to develop this area well.

Managing the expectations of landowners and community groups is important and a series of priority areas may be used overt he five years of the Wilder Horsham District Project.

1. **Resilient Communities:** Linking communities to their local greenspaces and building networks for wildlife.

**SWT Staff involvement:** The WHD Community Support Officer will provide the first point of contact for community groups. A community group wishing to contribute to the Horsham NRN will be put in touch with the WHD Landowner Advisor. Other community engagement may take place led by SWT engagement experts and this work will be linked into the project through the WHD Steering Group. There are a range of SWT activities, already in existence that can be applied more proactively to Horsham District, e.g. Wildlife Updates for Parish Newsletters, or the delivery of SWT courses.

It is the hope that after five years of this funded project, mechanisms, both national and local can be established to maintain investment into Nature’s Recovery in Horsham District.

**Wilder Horsham District - Nature Network Award Scheme:**

Funding is available over the five years of this project through an award scheme each year for communities and landowners to undertake activities to contribute to the Horsham District Nature Recovery Network. The scheme will be administered by the WHD Community Support Officer with the Landowner Advisor prioritising applications to set criteria, supported by Horsham District Council and Sussex Wildlife Trust colleagues.

**Basic Principles of the Nature Recovery Network (NRN) Approach.**

The NRN for Horsham District needs to be embedded into a broader Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) which will involve a range of mechanisms led by the Local Authority and others to ensure the effectiveness of the developing NRN. Details of the requirements of LNRSs are anticipated in the forthcoming Environment Bill.

Colleagues in Horsham District Council and Sussex Wildlife Trust are active in developing Regional and County level criteria for Nature Recovery Networks, that can then be implemented in Horsham District.

Without a formal map for what a Horsham District Nature Recovery network entails, a key set of principles are important. These are listed below with a brief explanation of the role of the WHD team, and SWT and HDC colleagues.

**1. Hold the line: protect existing protected sites and areas of importance for nature from further loss of area, condition or fragmentation.**

These ‘core areas’ are the FOUNDATION of the NRN and much more must be done to protect this from further damage. There will be a lot of focus through NRN work on creating new habitat – but this may not be effective if existing sites, particularly of ancient habitats on biodiverse soils, continue to be lost.

**WHD Staff Role:** Highlight concerns over specific sites if known

**SWT Role:** Champion existing sites through core work. Work alongside HDC if concern for a site needs to be escalated to a statutory body.

**HDC Role:** Statutory responsibilities. A program of Continuing Professional Development as part of WHD may identify key areas of activity to support this work.

**2. Improve what we have – focusing resources initially on the bits ‘on the brink’**

Improving condition of existing habits is vital as most are in sub-optimal condition. This will deliver benefits for nature – and also increased flows of other benefits of value to people. As with protection, there is a risk that this element is overlooked in the creation of NRN and LNRS

**WHD Staff Role:** Work with landowners and community groups to identify relevant areas and identify mechanisms for improvement. Support the delivery of Activities

**SWT Role:** Link WHD officer to existing network of projects and resources available to support landowners and community groups

**HDC Role:** Statutory responsibilities. Parks and Countryside team to develop and demonstrate best practice for the District. Continuing Professional development relating to biodiversity within the District Council to highlight new areas for leadership and best practice in biodiversity delivery.

**3. Build on the foundation of core sites by expanding and connecting sites to improve the network. Focus initially on making what we have work better for nature as a network!**

This will require spatial identification of ‘potential areas’ of habitat creation and restoration to do the ‘bigger and joined’ bit of the Lawton approach

**WHD Staff Role:** Work with landowners and community groups to identify relevant areas and identify mechanisms for delivery. Support the delivery of activities.

**SWT Role:** Link WHD officer to existing network of projects and resources available to support landowners and community groups. Direct relevant requests for support to WHD team.

**HDC Role:** Statutory responsibilities. Strong link with parks and Countryside team.

**4. Uplift nature in the wider landscape between existing sites and potential areas.**

The Lawton approach is based on ‘island biogeography’ – where sites, corridors and stepping stones for wildlife sit within a wider landscape ‘matrix’. The NRN needs to focus not only on sites and linkages, but also on how to uplift nature within this wider matrix (e.g. in soil, agricultural land, urban areas and so on).

**WHD Staff Role:** WHD staff focus on the development of the network (1, 2 and 3 above). Opportunities in the wider landscape are highlighted through work with other stakeholders.

**SWT Role:** SWT team focus on influence on the wider landscape throughout Sussex.

**HDC Role:** Statutory responsibilities. To champion and influence this process where appropriate.

**5. Seek restoration of natural processes at a large scale – as a way of achieving the above**

This may not be feasible in many places to start with, but opportunities to join up activity at a large scale via a ‘rewilding approach’ should be sought and if possible broadly zoned on a map!

**WHD Staff Role:** Staff to always be seeking large scale opportunities, whilst appreciating that most opportunities in district will be of a smaller scale, sue to landownership patterns in lowland UK.

**SWT Role:** To support WHD team and champion restoration of natural processes.

**HDC Role:** Statutory responsibilities. To champion and influence this process as appropriate.

1. **Policy:** National policies and local frameworks relating to Nature Recovery Networks are currently fluid as we await the finalised national policy through the Environment Bill and structure for the local implementation. The principles overleaf are current thinking on how to locally develop a Nature Recovery Network and new guidelines are being published regularly, most recently by Natural England (March 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **Data:** Horsham District is the beneficiary of high quality biodiversity data, both raw and interpreted and this data can be used to map core areas for the District as well as areas of potential for some key habitats. The data is available to the Wilder Horsham District Project staff through the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)