



# Wilder Horsham District

## Wilder Horsham District

End of Year Report 20 – 21

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

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

**COVER IMAGE**  
Longlands deep cut stream



# Summary of Achievements

## 2020 - 2021

Landscape Resilience	
Sites and Partnerships	
Landowner sites visited	7
Horsham District Council sites	4
Partnerships/projects involved with	9
Nature Recovery Award	
Successful Applications	3
Funding Value Awarded	£10,968

Community Resilience	
Community Links	
Community groups engaged with	19
Organisations engaged with	16
Parish/neighbourhood councils we've had bespoke contact with	2
Parish/neighbourhood council and community group talks	3
Events for communities	2
Communications	
Press/magazine/newsletter releases (that we are aware of)	32
Blogs	4
Blog views	3,168 / 2,882 unique
Average monthly Facebook reach	4,800
Webpage views	9,720 / 8,114 unique

Organisational Resilience	
Landowner sites visited	2

Finance	
Original Budget	£84,200
Annual Expenditure (incl. grant funding)	£41,351
Annual Underspend	£42,849

# Project Progress

## Proposed Deliverables for WHD

Task No.	Deliverable	Responsible party	Date of completion	Progress to Date
1	Map a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) for the Horsham District which ultimately achieves better, more, bigger and joined up sites for biodiversity. The map should be kept up to date in accordance with evolving best practice.	SWT	End May 2025	A first version of a NRN for the Horsham District has been produced. This will be a living document that will be continually developed and updated over the course of the project. A version of this has been shared with key partners, mainly via online presentations.
2	The NRN should ultimately aim to cover 30% of Horsham District and seek to achieve a 20% increase in the number of designated sites in positive management	SWT	End May 2025	The identified priority areas within the NRN cover over 30% of Horsham District, and so make a good focus through which to start achieving this target. The priority areas include designated sites which the project will seek to work with.
3	Identify priority areas within the NRN as a basis for focusing the work of the project	SWT/HDC	Annually	Priority areas have been identified within the NRN. Core areas, areas of very high habitat potential and areas of high habitat potential have been mapped, as well as buffer zones for the core sites and potential linking habitat.
4	Link the Wilder Horsham District NRN to the evolving Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the work of the Sussex Local Nature Partnership	SWT	April 2022	The draft NRN map has been shared with both the Local Nature Partnership (LNP) and Natural England via an internet presentation. The LNP had a Pilot NRN mapping project (in East Sussex) in progress and there was a mutual exchange of ideas and methodologies with Andrew Lawson, of the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre, who was leading on this work.
5	Link the developing NRN to existing landscape and catchment initiatives within the Horsham District to increase wildlife benefit	SWT	End May 2025	The project is working with the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust (OART) and has joined catchment partnership meetings. On the Arun we are involved with the Arun Valley Wader Survey.

Task No.	Deliverable	Responsible party	Date of completion	Progress to Date
6	Provide bespoke advice to a minimum of 60% of Parish/Neighbourhood Councils, 80 community groups and 120 landowners. For this advice & support to reflect the geographical spread of the project's annual priorities	SWT	End of May 2025	Bespoke advice has been provided to 5% of Parish/Neighbourhood Councils, 19 community groups and 7 landowners across Horsham District.
7	Operate and promote the Nature Recovery Award. Report on the number of awards given, a description of the projects, including the type, total hectareage and distances of new or improved habitats	SWT	Annually	Set up and launched the Nature Recovery Award in November 2020 and have since run three application rounds and awarded funding to three successful applications. Nature Recovery Award outcomes are stated in report cards issued at the quarterly Steering Group meetings. The Award has been promoted on the project's webpage, external websites, external talks, social media and local magazines.
8	Report to the project board including a financial update, number of contacts and events for landowners, individuals, groups and organisations and projects that have received support/advice. Data should include hectareage & distances of new or improved habitat, as well as the contribution to Natural Capital Services, where possible	SWT	Quarterly (papers to be distributed a week before the Steering Group meeting)	Held quarterly Steering Group meetings since the project's start. Each meeting involved presenting project report cards, and sharing financial, communications, mapping, and landowner and community project updates.
9	Produce an annual report summarising the progress and achievements of the project, using suitable mapping and metrics	SWT	Annually (a maximum of 2 months after the end of the financial year)	Annual report produced. Following years will include greater reporting of metrics and details as the project develops and has more to share.

# Project Progress continued

## Proposed Deliverables for WHD continued

Task No.	Deliverable	Responsible party	Date of completion	Progress to Date
0	Establish links with key organisations, such as West Sussex County Council and neighbouring Councils, to develop joint projects/working that will help deliver the NRN	HDC	End May 2025	We held an initial meeting with Ruth O'Brien from the WSCC Sustainability Team to discuss partnership working. A second meeting with a wider range of WSCC officers is scheduled for April 2021.
1	Establish a volunteer taskforce to undertake practical tasks to support the establishment of the NRN and where possible to complete habitat surveys and ongoing monitoring of sites, with landowner's agreement	SWT	End September 2021	Preliminary talks held over the creation of a volunteer taskforce, which will be in place by summer 2021. A list of people who have already expressed interest in volunteering has been created.
12	Hold three events (or equivalent) during the project to engage with the projects target audience, as well as an event to celebrate the successes & achievements of the project	SWT	End May 2025	No events held to date.
13	Hold the equivalent of 3 days of training/CPD for staff and members at HDC per annum	SWT	Annually	2 staff talks and 2 PDAGs held for a total of 5 hours (October 2020-March 2021).
14	Integrate NRN principles (incorporating biodiversity net gain) into Council planning processes, including the Local Plan & its supporting documents	HDC	End December 2022	The draft NRN was presented to the HDC planners. In addition to explaining the process and data behind the construction of the NRN it was shown with the proposed housing allocations mapped on top.
15	Identify biodiversity offset areas within the NRN to link with potential monies generated by biodiversity net gain	SWT	End December 2022	The mapping has provided some indications of where these areas might be, but this needs to be refined for this specific objective.

Task No.	Deliverable	Responsible party	Date of completion	Progress to Date
16	Review key HDC plans and policies to align them with the aims and objectives of the project	HDC	End June 2023	The project has engaged with HDC Officers and Councillors to explain the aims and objectives of the project, in particular the importance of connectivity for wildlife and the NRN.
17	Develop a strategic approach to the management of Council land including opportunities from development proposals and land acquisitions, to support the delivery of the NRN	HDC	End December 2021	The project has had online meetings with the HDC Parks and Countryside Team and begun developing this approach. A face-to-face meeting to discuss the high-level principles is scheduled for April 2021.
18	Review and implement appropriate land management practices on Council owned land to contribute to the development of the NRN	HDC	Review – end March 2022 May 2025	This will be the next stage of engagement with the HDC Parks and Countryside Team.
19	Review and update the Communications Plan. Report on the outcomes of this to the Steering Group; including relevant monitoring data	SWT/HDC	Quarterly	Communications Plan reviewed and updated quarterly by Wilder Horsham District and Horsham District Council staff, with quarterly reporting to the project board.
20	Incorporate an online resource on the project's website, for groups/ organisations to share experience and best practice	SWT	End March 2022	Sussex Wildlife Trust's website is currently in the process of a redesign, with plans to introduce new interactive and informative features.

# Project Progress continued

## Comments on 2020 – 2021

### The Impact of COVID-19

2020 was a globally challenging year with the coronavirus pandemic. This impacted the start of the project which was originally intended to begin in April 2020. In fact it started in the autumn, with the Community Support Officer beginning work on 22 September and The Landowner Advisor on 12 October. This meant that 2020-2021 was a truncated year for the project with both staff in post for less than half the financial year. Additionally Sussex was in lockdown for approximately four months of this, from 5th November to 2 December 2020 and from 21 December to 29 March 2021. During this time engagement with partners and community groups was only possible via online meetings and landowner visits were prohibited. Additionally volunteer work parties were impossible so that aspect of the project could not proceed during the winter of 2020-21.

### Project Activity

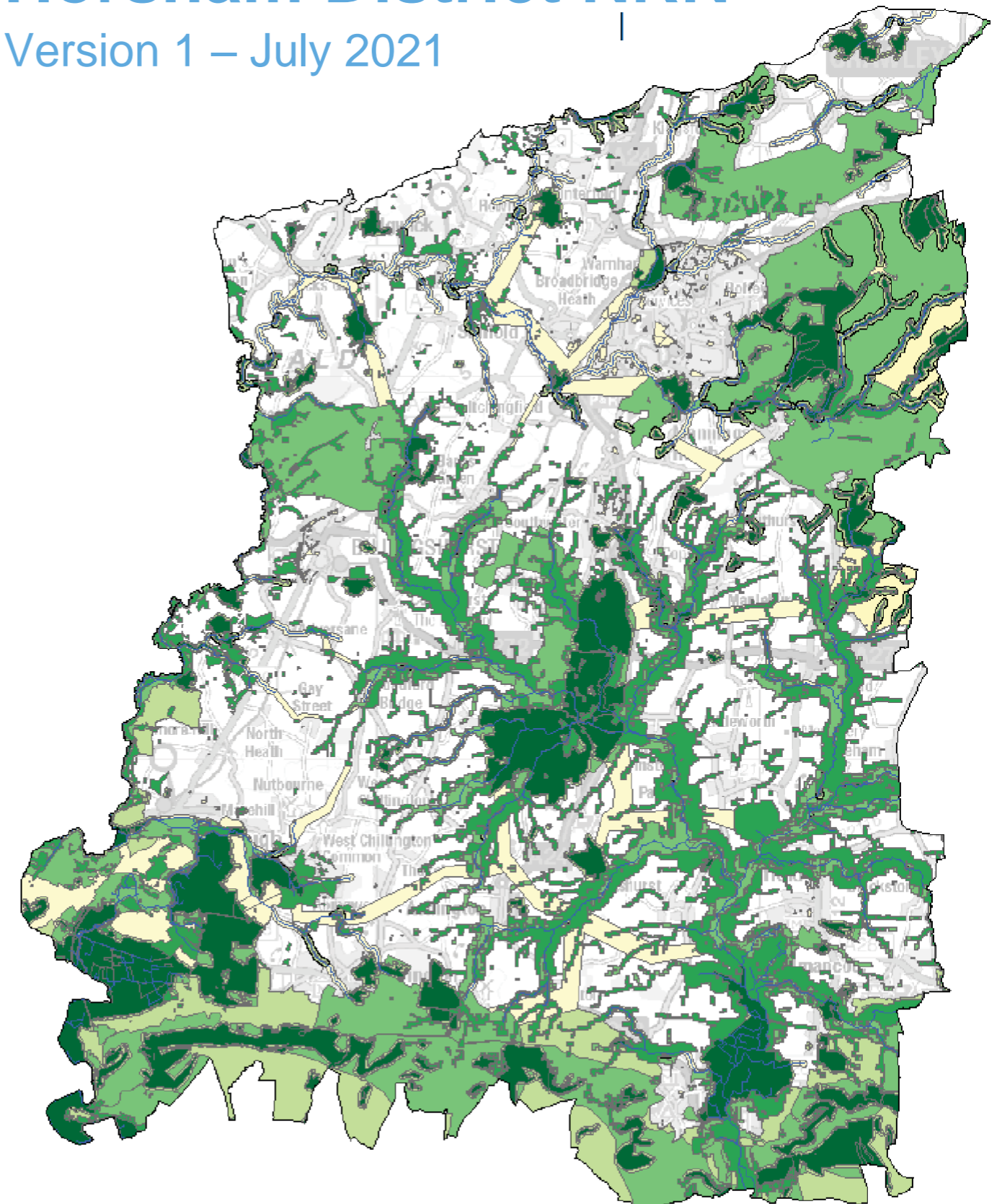
Although it limited some of the activities the timing of the lock-down was not as problematic for project delivery as it might have been at a later time. As this is the first year of the project there was a considerable amount to do in terms of setting up the project infrastructure as well as a significant amount of desk-based work that could still be progressed during lockdown.

In terms of the project infrastructure the: Nature Recovery Award process, financial infrastructure & reporting, social media, webpage, communications strategy, project board reporting & project report cards were all set-up during the first six months of the project. Good communication channels between SWT and HDC have meant that this proceeded smoothly despite the COVID-19 restrictions.

The enforced period of deskwork also allowed the project to make fast progress on producing a draft Nature Recovery Network (NRN) for Horsham District (Figure 1). This is “living document” that uses available data to map how an effective NRN could be built for Horsham District, identifying not only the core areas but areas of high habitat potential that might provide the connectivity that is vital for Nature Recovery. See also under “Proposed Deliverables” on pages 2-5

# Horsham District NRN

## Version 1 – July 2021



Contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database right 2021

- Watercourses
- Core sites with high nature value
- Very high habitat potential
- High habitat potential
- Buffer zones for core sites
- Potential corridors and stepping stones

# Project Progress continued

Comments on 2020 – 2021 continued



Rainbow over the Dragon's Estate

## Landowner Engagement Highlights

Landowner engagement was limited by COVID-19 restrictions, but some site visits were possible during the periods of relaxation in October and December. There are many land management techniques that can be used to promote Nature Recovery and the project will aim to utilise as many of them as possible. Regenerative agriculture and rewilding in particular have huge potential as, in different ways, both replicate natural systems. During the early weeks of the project we began working with two rewilding projects in the District.

The Knepp Estate is a long-running rewilding project at the centre of the District, and we have been discussing its crucial role in the Nature Recovery Network for Horsham District.

At the other end of the timeline The Dragon's Estate, to the North of Knepp, is just about to beginning its own rewilding project and we have been both advising them and supporting them in

their application to Natural England. The project will increase the area for nature Recovery in the heart of Horsham District and will also add a new element as it is much more wooded in character than Knepp. We look forward to working with them as the project develops.



Richard Black and a Landowner on a site visit

## Organisation Engagement Highlights

Wilder Horsham District gave two talks to Horsham District Council staff in 2020-21 as part of our commitment to provide three days of training for staff and members per annum. We have been delighted with the high engagement and positive feedback we have received after both talks. They were extremely well attended, with 49 and 51 people signing up respectively.

For our first talk, we introduced the Wilder Horsham District project. 95% of the 22 staff who responded said they would like more presentations on the project as it develops and would like to attend the next talk, and 100% rated the talk as 'good' or 'excellent'.

*'It was a great and informative session, and I'd just like to thank all of the speakers for their time and knowledge. This is a really exciting project for the District, and I look forward to seeing where it goes from here!'*

*'Overall excellent presentation and I hope Wilder HD will be an active part in anything that HDC does or is involved with. Volunteer registered mentioned – would be keen to sign up.'*

*In this feedback, several staff also requested more information on what they could do for wildlife as an individual, and so for our second talk we talked about 'What you can do for wildlife in your garden'. 100% of the 15 staff responses said they had been inspired to change their wildlife gardening habits as a result.*

*'I loved hearing about the small practical steps we can ALL take to make a difference at home.'*

*'Overall it was inspirational.'*

We have been overwhelmed by the response and interest of Horsham District Council staff, which has also included many requests to volunteer for the project. We hope to continue to offer value through our talks in the future and look forward to getting staff involved with project volunteering.



WSSC's  
Community Road  
Verge Scheme



Richard Black and other Sussex Wildlife Trust staff visiting Sustainable Henfield

## Community Engagement and Media Highlights

The response from local communities and individuals to the project has been overwhelmingly positive. Existing community groups promoting conservation and nature recovery have shown great interest in working with us, as have new communities and individuals who wish to be involved. For a new project, such a level of initial response from a variety of people within Horsham District is very exciting, and we look forward to developing the best ways of supporting such groups and adding value to existing work.

The project's work on promoting wildlife-friendly verges is a particular highlight. While presenting at West Sussex County Council's (WSSC) 'Who Loves a Pollinator' online event, the topic of verges and WSSC's community road verges scheme was raised. Following the event, and several comments on the project's social media requesting we take action for verges, we held an initial meeting with WSSC to discuss verge management and the promotion of community verges. Subsequent posts on social media about the community verges scheme have reached over 10,500 people, with several communities inspired to start their own discussions around working together to identify and place applications for verges in their local areas. This is our greatest media response to date and highlights the level of enthusiasm and time Horsham District residents have for nature recovery if we can link them with the relevant opportunities and support.

# Next Steps

With lockdown ending in March we start engaging with landowners in April. There has been considerable interest in the landowner advice service, and we have a backlog of site visits that had to be postponed.

In particular we will be looking to promote natural processes: Natural Flood Management (NFM), natural grazing systems and natural succession as part of our advice to landowners. The next annual report will include metrics showing how much influence we have had in these areas as well as carbon capture.

We will also be working with colleagues in the Sussex Wildlife Trust to engage further with communities and will be defining what we will be asking of them to promote Nature Recovery as well as what we are offering.

We will be starting our volunteer programme. We will be looking to recruit both survey volunteers, to record the wildlife we currently have in Horsham District, and habitat management volunteers, for winter work parties that will go out and help make a difference on the ground.

We will continue to promote the Nature Recovery Award and will work with applicants to help them deliver the best project possible.

We will continue to expand our audience and reach on our social media channels to maximise our online community engagement; share the work we are doing and create new connections. With site visits resumed, new content will focus on sharing photos and details of the project's active work, such as site visits.

[Richard Black and Chloe Harrison](#)  
[Wilder Horsham District June 2021](#)



## Wilder Horsham volunteer vacancies

We have some specialist volunteer vacancies to take part in ecological surveys for the Wilder Horsham project, in particular for plants and invertebrates. There will be training provided and an opportunity to volunteer flexibly.

[Email us about Wilder Horsham](#)



**Sussex**  
Wildlife Trust



**Horsham**  
District  
Council

