

## Report to Cabinet

28<sup>th</sup> November 2019

By the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture



### DECISION REQUIRED

Not Exempt

## Wilder Horsham District

### Executive Summary

Horsham District Council already takes measures to protect and enhance the natural environment across the District and particularly on its own land. For example, Warnham Nature Reserve is of countywide importance for its species richness due to sympathetic land management. It is third in Sussex for the number of species recorded on a protected site; with a total of 3118 species and of these 169 are nationally scarce. This report proposes to enhance this approach by establishing a unique partnership with the Sussex Wildlife Trust. This will build on a long standing relationship that the Council already has with the Trust. The partnership will focus on ensuring that wildlife thrives across Horsham District by creating networks and expanding habitats. In doing so, we hope to enhance nature across the District, therefore, reversing the declines that have occurred over the last few decades.

The report seeks approval to create the partnership and includes a document which sets out the actions that will be taken over the next five years. The funding requested in the report is £571,000 for the life of the programme. Outcomes from the programme will be regularly reviewed to ensure delivery, with associated adjustments to the budget. The Sussex Wildlife Trust are also contributing funding to the partnership.

The report also proposes establishing two funding pots in 2020/21. One to provide implementation funding for Parish Councils and communities wishing to undertake projects that complement the partnership and one to plant trees on Council owned land to replace ones that are felled due to disease and pests. These require ongoing funding but would be regularly reviewed.

### Recommendations

That the Cabinet is recommended:

- i) To approve the formation of a partnership with the Sussex Wildlife Trust.
- ii) To approve the partnership document and endorse its aims and actions.
- iii) To recommend to Council that the budget for 2020/21 includes a green reserve of £571,000 for the costs of the Wilder Horsham District programme.

### Reasons for Recommendations

To allow the partnership with the Sussex Wildlife Trust to be formed, with the associated resources to achieve the aims of the partnership over a five year period.

To provide a budget to replace trees lost to disease and pests etc. on Council owned land.

## **Background Papers**

Environment Bill (2019) HM Government

Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network (September 2010) Professor Sir John Lawton CBE FRS

A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018) HM Government

State of Nature Report (2019) State of Nature Partnership

Biodiversity Net Gain: Consultation Proposals (December 2018) Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Sussex Natural Capital Investment Strategy. Summary for Adoption (October 2019) Sussex Local Nature Partnership

Green Infrastructure Strategy (April 2014) Horsham District Planning Framework

**Wards affected:** All

**Contact:** Helen Peacock, Project Developer; extension 5512.

## Background Information

### 1 Introduction and Background

1.1 In June 2019 the Council approved the following Notice of Motion:-

*“We agree that in the face of recent dire warnings from the World Scientific community concerning global warming, the loss of millions of insects and animal species and rampant deforestation, we are facing a climate emergency.*

*We propose therefore that this Council develops and implements a plan for the use of renewable technologies, sustainable transport options, zero carbon building, and for waste reduction and enhanced recycling within the District, working towards a net zero carbon target.*

*We acknowledge that there will need to be public engagement and involvement, and resources will be required to underpin and support the long-term requirements of this far reaching proposal.”*

- 1.2 The Council is responsible for managing 1000 acres of greenspace across the District. This includes sites with high nature conservation value, such as Warnham Nature Reserve, Chesworth Farm and Owlbeech Woods. These have been managed creatively for wildlife for many years. For example, British White Cattle are grazed at several sites, including Warnham Nature Reserve, Chesworth Farm and Monkmead Wood. This improves the grassland and increases the population of insects and wildflowers. These type of management practices are reflected in the wildlife value of the Councils sites. For example, Chesworth Farm has recently been designed as a Local Wildlife Site in recognition of its importance for wildlife at a county level. Warnham Nature Reserve is third in Sussex for the number of species recorded on a protected site; with a total of 3118 species and of these 169 are nationally scarce. Twenty six 26 species of dragonfly, damselfly or demoiselle have been recorded here which represents 83% of the total population in Sussex.
- 1.3 This report sets out the Council next steps to address local biodiversity loss that was acknowledged in the Notice of Motion. It recommends that the Council forms a partnership with the Sussex Wildlife Trust. This would build on the strong relationship that the Council already has with the Trust. This is a conservation charity which aims to protect natural life in Sussex and is based in Small Dole. It has considerable expertise in new approaches to nature conservation that seek to reverse the decline in wildlife. The partnership with the Trust would utilise this expertise through a new five year programme known as Wilder Horsham District.
- 1.4 The natural environment forms an important part of the identity of the District. Not only is wildlife in decline but the District also has to provide new homes. New approaches are, therefore, required to ensure that wildlife is protected and enhanced as part of what makes the District a special place to live and work. The partnership would work with landowners, organisations and communities to reverse the declines in wildlife that have taken place over the last 20 to 30 years. This work would also incorporate Council owned land and build on the work of the Parks and Countryside Team. It will also link to the Local Plan Review. For example, the Government has consulted on a process to introduce biodiversity net gain into the planning system which aims to increase biodiversity in all new developments. The

partnership will support the development and implementation of a new policy on this issue.

- 1.5 A member seminar prior to Cabinet on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2019 provided context for the proposals in this report. This included presentations from the ecologist at the Knepp Estate, the president of the Sussex Wildlife Trust and the Senior Countryside Warden from the Parks and Countryside team. These explained the context of the new approach to enhancing nature, with examples of the approach being taken at the Knepp Estate and the difference this has made to species and habitats at this site. It also included an overview of the work of the Parks and Countryside team and how they manage the Council's main sites.

## 2 Relevant Council policy

- 2.1 One of the five themes from the emerging Corporate Plan 2019-2023 is a Cared for Environment which prioritises the “**protection of our environment as we move to a low carbon future**”. The following activities and projects under this theme are relevant to this report:-
- improve the ecology and biodiversity of the District;
  - improve the ecology, wildlife and biodiversity of our parks, open spaces and countryside;
  - embed biodiversity into our planning policies for a sustainable built environment which delivers net biodiversity gains and protects the natural environment;
  - protect our trees and ancient woodland and work with the Sussex Wildlife Trust to review our natural environment and how we can enhance it.

## 3 Details

### *Why a Wilder Horsham District?*

- 3.1 There is increasing evidence that wildlife across the country is in decline. Since the 1970's the populations of 41% of UK species have reduced and 15% of species are now under threat of extinction<sup>1</sup>. This is also reflected in the Horsham District. Habitats such as wildflower meadows that were commonplace 30 years ago are now rare. There are currently no water bodies in the River Adur catchment with a Water framework Directive status of good or very good. This impacts on the species in the rivers. For example, water voles, a key indicator species of a healthy river ecosystem, have not been recorded breeding in the River Adur catchment for over 20 years. Bird and insect populations have drastically reduced in Sussex. For example, nightingale populations have declined 57% since 1995.
- 3.2 Over the last 50 years nature conservation has largely concentrated on protecting specific species and habitats. In some cases this has been successful, however, in the wider environment wildlife has declined dramatically. This is important because wildlife is intrinsic to the natural environment that makes the Horsham District a special place to live and work. Furthermore, nature provides many benefits to

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<sup>1</sup> State of Nature Report (2019) State of Nature Partnership (this is a group of over 70 nature conservation organisations)

society that will be lost if wildlife continues to decline. These range from removing pollutants from air and water and pollinating crops to provide food, to the health and wellbeing benefits from being amongst nature. There are also economic benefits from a high quality natural environment, such as a healthy workforce and attracting investment. Finally, ensuring a thriving natural environment will also contribute to tackling climate change, which is another Council priority. For example, some habitats and planting trees, absorb carbon which is the main gas contributing to climate heating. A thriving natural environment can also reduce the impact of climate change, such as reducing the impact of intense rainfall and the potential for flooding.

- 3.3 The need to reverse this decline has been acknowledged by the Government, both through the 25 Environment Plan and the recently published Environment Bill. The Bill, if enacted, will place a duty on Council's to enhance biodiversity and report on the actions that it is taking. The partnership with the Sussex Wildlife Trust proposed in this report, and the associated Wilder Horsham District programme, will ensure that the Council is able to fulfil the duties placed on it by this new legislation. It will also link to the Local Plan Review, such as providing a framework for implementing the mandatory requirement for all development to provide biodiversity net gain.

#### ***What the partnership will achieve***

- 3.4 The partnership with the Sussex Wildlife Trust will be for five years. The aims of the partnership require a longer term approach for delivery. For example, it will take time to establish relationships with landowners to manage land for the benefit of wildlife and, therefore, develop networks where wildlife is enhanced.

- 3.5 The aims of the five year partnership are to:-

- ***Help wildlife thrive across the Horsham District;***
- ***Create networks of land that is protected and enhanced for wildlife, to allow habitats to expand and for species populations to increase which will ensure that they are resilient to change;***
- ***Increase awareness of actions that communities can take to improve their local natural environment and the benefits that wildlife provides;***
- ***Maximise the opportunities from protecting and enhancing wildlife to tackling climate change and to reduce the impacts of a changing climate.***

A partnership document which includes an action plan on how the aims will be achieved is included as an appendix to this report.

- 3.6 Achieving these aims requires a new approach to wildlife conservation and enhancement; one based on a landscape approach which complements the traditional habitat and species targeted approach. Although the Horsham District has a highly valued landscape and natural environment it does not have an overabundance of wildlife sites with national protection; for example, there are 23 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and these are largely situated within the north eastern and southern parts of the District. This is low compared to the neighbouring Local Authority areas. For example, Chichester District has 38 SSSI's.

The protected areas in the District, and habitats generally, have become fragmented and isolated and are, therefore, vulnerable to change.

- 3.7 A landscape approach starts by identifying existing wildlife assets; which are places that are important locally for wild plants and animals. This will link to the work of the Sussex Local Nature Partnership which has started this work for the whole of Sussex. As a broad collaboration this Partnership is establishing the basic principles that will underpin a Sussex wide Nature Recovery Network, in line with emerging policy and legislation. The following are examples of habitats that need to be enhanced:-
- Hedgerows in the Low Weald (providing important connectivity between fragmented habitats)
  - Woodland – reintroducing management, new planting and allowing natural regeneration are important tools in capturing more carbon and helping wildlife
  - The Adur catchment; improve freshwater and floodplain habitats, water quality and flood resilience through working with natural processes.
- 3.8 To enable wildlife to thrive the sites will be linked via Nature Recovery Networks. Such a network allows plants, animals, seeds, nutrients and water to move from place to place and enables the natural world to adapt to change. Identifying the key natural assets and areas that will form part of the Networks will use data from the Biodiversity Records Centre which is run by the Sussex Wildlife Trust. The land that forms the network would be managed to benefit wildlife. An example of changing land management can be seen at the Knepp Estate in the Horsham District. Over the last twenty years the Estate has introduced an approach known as rewilding. Intensive agricultural practices have been replaced by introducing free-roaming grazing animals and allowing wildlife to regenerate without minimal land management. This has allowed different habitats to regenerate which support a larger range of species and larger populations of these species. Rewilding will not be appropriate in all circumstances or at the scale used at the Knepp Estate. However, the partnership would seek to incorporate some of these principles in appropriate locations to create the Nature Recovery Network.
- 3.9 The Network would not be restricted to countryside sites. It is equally important that it links to greenspaces in urban areas. Overall this will not only enhance the Network but also ensure that residents in towns and villages have access to natural environments. This would bring health and wellbeing benefits and increase opportunities for residents to engage with nature.
- 3.10 The partnership will work with local landowners, communities and Parish Councils to create the Nature Recovery Networks. The Sussex Wildlife Trust have over 15 years of experience of working with landowners. The partnership will draw on this experience. Advice and support for landowners and managers would be provided by a new a Landscape Advisor (full time) post. Whilst advice and support for communities/Parish Councils would be via a new Community Support Officer (part-time). Both posts would be employed by the Sussex Wildlife Trust but most of the costs of the posts would be covered by the Council.
- 3.11 Land owned by the Council will form part of these networks. The Parks and Countryside Team already manage land in Council ownership for the benefit of wildlife but expertise from the Sussex Wildlife Trust will enhance this. This Team

already has extensive links with volunteers and community groups which can be harnessed to contribute to the aims of the partnership. There is a strong appetite in the District for volunteer environmental work. The partnership with the Trust will allow a strategic approach to harnessing this interest. The aim is for more communities to understand and engage with this approach to enhancing wildlife and improve open areas so that they can form part of the Nature Recovery Network. As stated above a part-time post would assist with this. Implementation funding, provided by the Council, would also be available to support initiatives by communities that contribute to the aims of Wilder Horsham District.

- 3.12 Trees will undoubtedly play an important role in the Nature Recovery Network. The Parks and Countryside Team are responsible for managing trees on Council owned land. However, they are increasingly under pressure from climate change, pollution, pests and diseases. This results in approximately 50 trees per annum being felled. It is, therefore, recommended that a funding pot be created from 2020/21 to plant replacement trees and for the ongoing maintenance. The impact of introducing this funding would be reviewed after 12 months.
- 3.13 The partnership will have a direct link to the Local Plan Review. A new mandatory approach to biodiversity net gain has been introduced in the Environment Bill. This will require developers to ensure habitats for wildlife are enhanced, with a 10% increase in habitat value for wildlife compared with the pre-development baseline. Details of this requirement are awaited; a consultation on this closed in December 2018. However, the principle will impact on the Local Plan and new development schemes. The partnership with the Sussex Wildlife Trust will provide the expertise to implement this locally and help develop appropriate policies in the Local Plan Review. Development proposals will need to take account of the Nature Recovery Network. In turn, where sufficient biodiversity net gain cannot be achieved within a development funding would be provided by the developer to improve biodiversity in the local area. Once Nature Recovery Networks for the District have been identified these sums could be used to enhance wildlife on land in the Network.
- 3.14 Funding for developing the Nature Recovery Network will not just be limited to the links with biodiversity net gain. The partnership with the Sussex Wildlife Trust will maximise opportunities to leverage additional funding. For example, Wildlife Trusts are developing investment models for developing Networks. The Council will, therefore, have access to the expertise that is being developed and other sources of funding.
- 3.15 The final aspect of the partnership is to increase awareness of Wilder Horsham District and the new approaches to enhancing wildlife throughout the Council. The Trust will provide training sessions for staff and members. Some training will be specific to certain teams, such as planning, whilst others will give a general overview, so that the principles of enhancing wildlife is embedded throughout the organisation.

## **4 Next Steps**

- 4.1 The first priority for the programme is to ensure that the work identified in the partnership programme relating to the Local Plan Review is progressed immediately; such as how biodiversity net gain will be implemented locally. The Sussex Nature Partnership has already produced some data on priority natural

assets for the District this will be used as the basis for identifying Nature Recovery Networks. The recruitment of the Landscape Advisor will also be required early in the programme to start to build relationships with local landowners and organisations to establish the Nature Recovery Networks. A set of proxy indicators will be developed to measure and monitor the outputs from the programme once there is more information on the Nature Recovery Networks.

## **5 Views of the Policy Development Advisory Group and Outcome of Consultations**

- 5.1 Leisure and Culture Policy Development Advisory Group discussed the proposal in detail and fully supported the partnership with the Sussex Wildlife Trust and the associated Wilder Horsham District programme, as well as the recommendations in this report.
- 5.2 Environment, Waste and Recycling Policy Development Advisory Group discussed the proposed partnership and programme and supported the recommendations in this report.
- 5.3 The Director of Corporate Resources provided advice on the funding for the proposal. Minor amendments were made to the report in light of the comments received. The most significant change was to include the total financial implications of the proposals in the report and not just an annual budget.
- 5.4 The Head of Legal Services was consulted on the report and did not make any substantive comments, however, some minor amendments were made to the content of the report. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development provided advice on the employment aspects of the two new posts created as part of the programme.
- 5.5 The Head of Strategic Planning suggested some minor changes to the report, such as reflecting the number of protected sites in the Horsham District compared to Chichester District. No concerns were expressed over the proposals in the report. An officer from this team contributed to the partnership document and action tables.
- 5.6 The Head of Leisure and Culture supports the proposals in the report. Officers from Parks and Countryside were involved in drawing up the partnership document and action plans.

## **6 Other Courses of Action Considered but Rejected**

- 6.1 The main alternative course of action was the “do nothing option”. However, given the commitments in the Notice of Motion and the importance given to biodiversity in the Corporate Plan this option was rejected.
- 6.2 The emerging legislation relating to the need to enhance, and not just protect biodiversity (see section 8 of this report) means that the Council requires expertise to draw up relevant policies and to implement actions. The Sussex Wildlife Trust has the necessary expertise and is based in the District. The Council already has



strong links with the Trust and the partnership would build on these, to the benefit of both organisations.

## 7 Resource Consequences

- 7.1 The financial consequences of establishing the Wilder Horsham District partnership and a replacement tree planting programme are set out in the following table. The intention is for the Wilder Horsham District programme to operate for five years. Subject to review, the funding for the replacement trees would be an ongoing commitment. However, both of these would be monitored and reviewed regularly to determine if the levelling of funding is appropriate. The total cost to the Council over the five year period is anticipated to be £571,000. This is a minimum cost as the salaries for the two posts are likely to increase over the five year period, due to inflation, for example. An earmarked green reserve of £571,000 would be created for the proposals in this report.

<b>A Wilder Horsham District</b>			
<b>Contributor</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Annual cost</b>	<b>Total cost</b>
Sussex Wildlife Trust	Training, events, advice to Strategic Planning & community groups etc. (years 1 to 5)		£16,125
Sussex Wildlife Trust	Cost recovery for hosting the two new posts	£22,380	£111,900
	<b>Total</b>		<b>£128,025</b>
HDC	Landscape Advisory post (full time) Salary and overheads	£42k	£210,000
HDC	Community Support post (part time) Salary and overheads	£11k	£55,000
HDC	Implementation funding	£30k	£150,000
	Events (year 1 &5)		£6,000
			<b>£421,000</b>
<b>Associated environmental project</b>			
HDC	Funding for replacement trees	£30k	£150,000
	<b>HDC Total</b>		<b>£571,000</b>

- 7.2 The other consequence from establishing the partnership with the Sussex Wildlife Trust and implementing Wilder Horsham District is on staff time. The main impacts will be on the Strategic Planning Team and Parks and Countryside Team. In terms of the Strategic Planning Team, the work on producing a policy relating to biodiversity net gain and how this would be implemented locally on an ongoing basis has already been identified as part of the work on the Local Plan Review. This policy development will link to the formation of the Nature Recovery Networks. The main piece of additional work would be to review and update the Green Infrastructure Plan.

- 7.3 The Parks and Countryside Team would be impacted by the Wilder Horsham District programme. Again this should mostly complement the work that the Team already undertakes; such as changing land management practices and working with community groups. The Team would be part of the review and update of the Green Infrastructure Plan. The replacement tree programme will be overseen by the Council's Trees and Contracts Officer. The work would be undertaken by the Council's contractor and the costs of the additional work have been included in the costs set out in the previous table.

## 8 Legal Consequences

- 8.1 Under the **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006** the Council has a duty to have regard for conserving biodiversity as part of policy or decision making. This can be expressed in several ways, such as how the Council manages its land or implements the planning system. The proposed partnership with the Sussex Wildlife Trust and the Wilder Horsham District programme are both compliant with this duty. In fact both of these proposals extend beyond conserving biodiversity by aiming to enhance wildlife habitats and species.
- 8.2 In October 2019 the Government introduced a **new Environment Bill**. If enacted this will introduce a comprehensive range of new initiatives relating to several aspects of the environment; including recognising the need to enhance biodiversity.
- 8.3 The Environment Bill will strengthen the duty in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 to **enhance** biodiversity, and requires Councils to actively carry out strategic assessments of the actions they can take to comply with this duty. Designated public authorities will also be required to produce a five-yearly report on the actions taken to comply with the new duty.
- 8.4 The Bill introduces mandatory biodiversity net gain, to ensure that new developments enhance biodiversity. It also introduces provisions requiring the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) across England. These are tools that will support better spatial planning for nature recovery, by setting out priorities and opportunities for protecting and investing in nature within a local area. They will include a map of existing nature assets including protected sites and wildlife-rich habitats and will identify key opportunities for enhancement. These spatial strategies will underpin the ability for key stakeholders (including Councils and landowners) to work together to deliver Nature Recovery Networks (NRNs).
- 8.5 The Council's Monitoring Officer will put in place a formal partnership agreement with Sussex Wildlife Trust to clearly set out the legal terms and conditions of the Wilder Horsham Partnership.

## 9 Risk Assessment

- 9.1 Key risks from this project are:-
- Landowners in the District do not engage with the programme
  - Community groups do not access the implementation fund
  - Horsham District Council and Sussex Wildlife Trust lack the capacity to support the partnership

- Pressure to deliver the Local Plan Review to the agreed timetable
- Difficulty recruiting to the proposed new posts.

9.2 Some of these risks would pose a significant risk to the programme. A full risk assessment, including mitigation measures will be completed if the partnership and programme are approved.

## **10 Other Considerations**

10.1 Implementing the Wilder Horsham District programme will improve the environmental sustainability of the District by enhancing wildlife across the district. The inclusion of landowners, organisations and communities in this programme will need to be carried out to ensure equality of access to events, advice, support and seed funding to ensure that the Council's obligations under the Equalities Act 2010 are complied with. There are no implications relating to crime and disorder. This report is considered to be consistent with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998.