Sussex Nature Recovery

A collective blueprint for targeted action

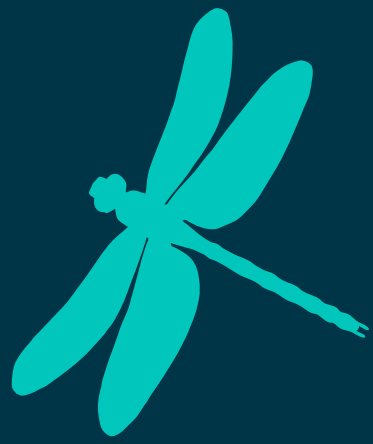
west sussex county council

West Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Non-Technical Summary

June 2026

Contents



How to use your Local Nature Recovery Strategy

This summary provides a brief overview of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for West Sussex and is intended to help you navigate it. The full LNRS is split into the three documents shown below and a Local Habitat Map. A further document (Part 4) provides supporting technical information.

Part 1 – Sets the scene for our strategy.

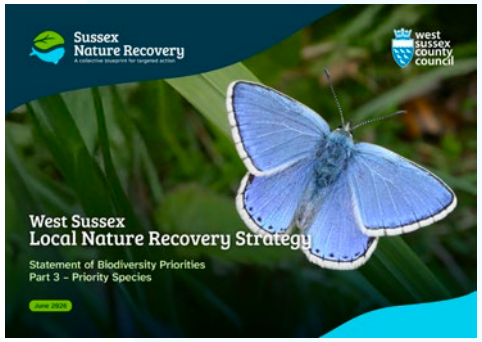
It describes:

- What a LNRS is and its scope.
- The **important habitats** found in West Sussex; their condition where known and location.
- The **pressures** on nature in West Sussex.
- What **local people** told us: the habitats, species and places they value and what they are concerned about.

Part 2 – Sets out what we need to do.

It provides:

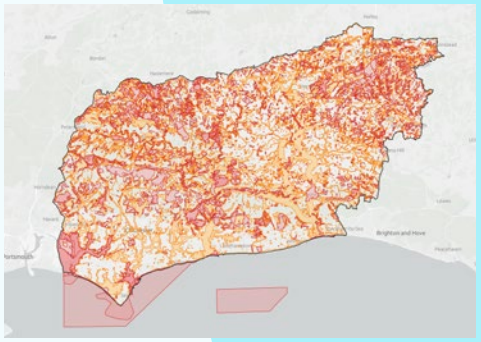
- **8 principles** to guide nature recovery in West Sussex.
- **24 priorities** related to our important habitats.
- **108 measures** – the practical actions that can be taken to bring about the priorities.



Part 3 – Species that the West Sussex LNRS will focus on supporting.

It contains:

- A list of our **Priority Species** and how this was developed.
- The specific **measures** needed to support their recovery (over and above those related to habitats).



Local Habitat Map – An interactive way of seeing where action could be taken.

It shows:

- Which areas of West Sussex are already important for nature.
- Where many of the measures identified in the strategy could be carried out to deliver the greatest benefit for wildlife and the wider environment.

You can view the LNRS documents and map here

Why do we need a Local Nature Recovery Strategy?

West Sussex boasts rare and important biodiversity. Nature has shaped our iconic landscapes, underpins vital sectors within our economy such as farming and tourism, supports our health and wellbeing and provides us with many other benefits including carbon storage and flood risk reduction.

But nature is in crisis

One in six of our species is at risk of extinction and the habitats on which they depend:

- **Have been lost** – often through urbanisation or intensive agriculture.
- **Are in poor condition** - from a range of pressures including pollution, climate change and invasive species.
- **Are fragmented** - habitats are limited to small pockets that are isolated from each other. This makes them more vulnerable to pressures and means wildlife lack a safe way to cross the landscape to find food, shelter or a mate.

What do we need to do?

We need to make our natural environment healthier, more plentiful and more resilient. That means creating more of the habitats which in turn support our species, and making these habitats **bigger, better and better connected to each other**.

Our land has multiple uses. It is where we grow our food, where we live and work, it provides space for recreation and is vital to our economy. It also supports nature, which in itself underpins all these other uses. We need to work better and be more coordinated at the local level to identify where action for nature can be delivered that is both achievable and will have most impact.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a new way to help do this.

What can the Local Nature Recovery Strategy do about the pressures on nature?

While the LNRS does not have any enforcement powers to directly tackle pressures:

- ✕ It can't directly stop development.
- ✕ It doesn't legally create new protected areas for nature.
- ✕ It can't dictate how land will be used or force landowners to act.
- ✕ It can't directly address the sources of pollution. These are covered by other areas of the law.

It is a key tool to help us mitigate their impact, by:

Targeting action for nature where it will have most impact, including directing new habitat creation from Biodiversity Net Gain.

Being an evidence base that Local Planning Authorities must "take account of" when developing things like Local Plans so that nature's recovery is properly considered alongside other land-use needs.

Helping farmers and landowners decide which environmental actions are most appropriate for their land and help align them to schemes and funding opportunities.

Identifying best places for nature-based solutions that help improve the quality of our air and water, reduce flooding, support farming and make our habitats more resilient to change.

Providing a single set of priorities and actions for everyone to rally behind, seek funding for, and work together to deliver on the ground.

What we need to do:

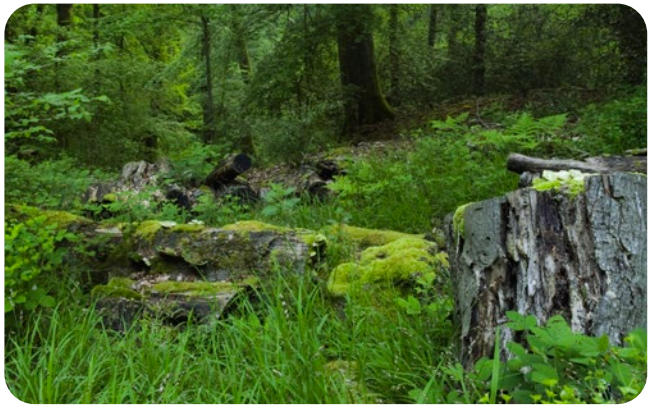
The eight principles that guide our approach to nature recovery

Principle 1.

In our core areas for nature, hold on to what we have and make it better.

West Sussex is blessed with many important areas for nature such as designated sites and irreplaceable habitats. Making up c.30% of West Sussex, these 'core sites' are the foundation of our nature-recovery network.

However, many of these important areas are currently in poor condition, are small or disconnected from each other, which limits their ability to support species and provide wider environmental benefits. We must start by conserving these core areas, preventing further loss, and improving their ecological condition and resilience.



The Mens, a large area of ancient woodland, is one of our core areas for nature. It is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and is home to the rare Barbastelle bat.
© Nigel Symington/Sussex Wildlife Trust

Principle 2.

Create a network of 'bigger, better, more and joined-up' wildlife-rich spaces across our rural and urban landscapes.

To support our core areas for nature, we also need to create new areas of habitat around them that make them bigger and help join them up across the landscape.

Being part of a healthy network of wildlife-rich spaces will increase our core areas' resilience to pressures and their ability to provide ecosystem services such as pollination, flood risk reduction and water quality improvements. It will also support our species by allowing them to move across the landscape.

The actions needed to do this vary from place to place. Our coastal habitats for example, have different requirements than the fragmented chalk grassland patches found in the South Downs National Park.

Principle 3.

Think big: work at scale to support ecosystems and natural processes.

Our landscapes have been heavily altered by human activity, putting important ecosystems under pressure and reducing the benefits they provide, such as flood management, carbon storage and coastal protection.

Achieving meaningful change in ecosystem functioning and habitat creation requires an ambition to work at scale and collaboratively rather than in isolation and in a small area. The LNRS supports the many ambitious landscape-scale initiatives already underway in our area.

Adur River Recovery is an ambitious land manager-led project to revitalise and restore one of the biggest rivers in West Sussex to improve water quality and biodiversity.
© Adur River Recovery

The eight principles continued

Principle 4.

Work together through a source-to-sea approach to support our terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine environments.

The LNRS doesn't include priorities for the marine environment because its legal scope only extends to mean low water. However, in practice, our land, freshwater, coastal and marine environments are all part of one connected system and what happens on land has an impact, not just on our freshwaters and coasts, but also on our seas.

A source-to-sea approach recognises this and encourages everyone involved to work together, to think upstream and downstream, and to identify how to tackle pressures and improve the functioning of the whole source-to-sea system.

Principle 5.

Showcase and support action for nature across our farmed landscapes.

Two thirds of West Sussex is farmed and farming has shaped our landscapes and habitats. However, changing agricultural policy and modern practices have put pressure on nature and the wider benefits they give us such as crop pollination.

Many farms and estates in West Sussex are actively supporting nature recovery through farmer clusters, landscape projects and regenerative farming practices. However, many smaller farms struggle to stay viable and cannot easily engage with complex schemes. Further progress for nature in our farmed landscapes will depend on practical support, funding, advice, and policies that help farmers and landowners at all scales.

Principle 6.

Support species special to West Sussex.

West Sussex is home to many rare, iconic and nationally or internationally important species. All depend on the quality and quantity of habitats found here, so creating a network of bigger, better, more and joined-up wildlife-rich spaces across our landscapes will go a long way to support their future survival.

Some species require extra help, over and above habitat improvements, so it is important we know what they need. Some species are indicators of general habitat health. Others are charismatic and can help people connect to nature, particularly in urban areas.

The Adonis blue butterfly is a downland specialist and is one of the most iconic species of unimproved chalk grassland in southern England.

The eight principles continued

Principle 7.

Invest in and use nature to deliver wider benefits where we need them.

Nature-based Solutions (NbS) use nature and the natural functions of habitats and ecosystems to tackle issues like flooding, coastal erosion, rising urban temperatures, water supply and quality, air quality and food production. They can also improve the local environment for people and provide more access and connection to nature, which helps our health and wellbeing. Using nature in this way is a 'win-win', helping to mitigate issues while supporting nature and wildlife through the creation of habitats.

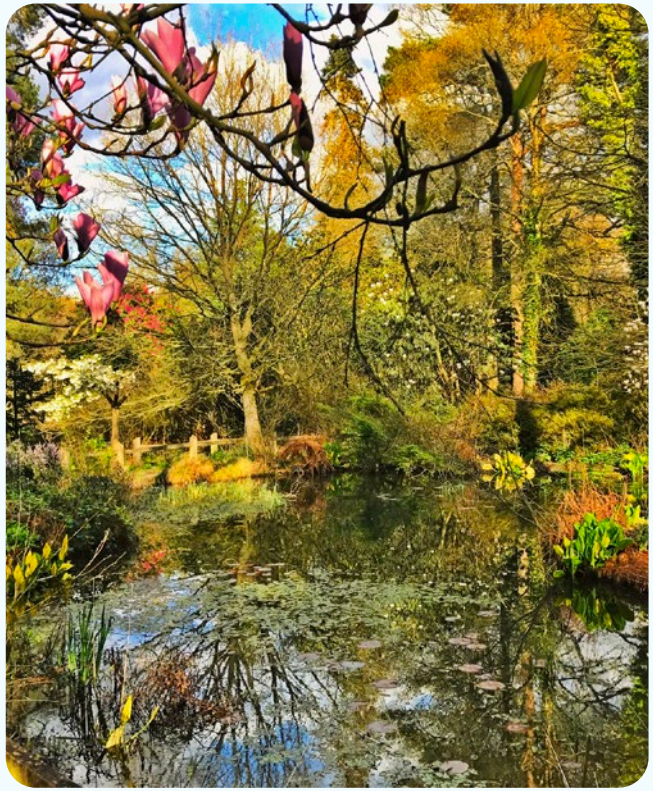
NbS also bring more funding into nature recovery, e.g. via funds to tackle flooding by creating a wetland. A key challenge is to know where and how to use a nature-based approach to deliver the required outcomes.

Principle 8.

Bringing nature into everyday life, providing places for people to benefit from and engage with nature.

Spending time in nature has a proven positive impact on our health and wellbeing. It also helps restore our connection with nature, which at the societal level, is vital to ensure wider support for nature and the types of decisions needed to achieve its recovery.

There are many other benefits to having nature-rich greenspaces in our neighbourhoods, but in parts of West Sussex, there is an acknowledged 'nature deficit'. Providing more areas of natural greenspace in urban areas can be challenging so there's a need to identify practical, achievable local opportunities, that are ideally community-led.



One of the lakes in Tilgate Park, a visitor favourite near Crawley © iStock.com/MiPhone_Pictures

Read the Principles in full, and how our strategy aims to help them, in Part 2 of the LNRS

What we need to do: Priorities and Measures

Each LNRS must produce a set of locally-agreed priorities for the key habitats in their area, supported by the achievable actions (called measures) that can bring them about. 24 habitat priorities and 108 practical measures were developed for West Sussex. These are summarised in the next 10 pages.

Our priorities and measures were informed by four sets of data:

Ecological evidence. Data on the condition, extent, pressures and opportunities related to habitats and species in West Sussex was reviewed. This information is summarised in Part 1 of the LNRS.

Existing published priorities. A comprehensive review of published plans and strategies (e.g. Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans, Catchment Management Plans) related to West Sussex was undertaken to identify existing nature-based priorities.

Views of local people. Residents, community groups, organisations and land managers were invited to tell us about their most important environmental issues through surveys and workshops.

Environmental and land management expertise. 40 of the key delivery and enabling organisations for nature in West Sussex helped to refine the priorities and develop the set of measures. Leading local and national species experts meticulously collated and reviewed species priorities.

How Priorities and Measures have been set out in the LNRS

FARMED LANDSCAPE & SOILS

Priority: FL1

Create and enhance opportunities for wildlife within the farmed landscape

Priorities: What the West Sussex LNRS should strive to achieve for nature recovery within its timeframe. Priorities are written as high level statements. Each priority has its own code (e.g. FL1) shared by its corresponding measures.

Measures: The actions 'on the ground' needed to deliver the priority.

How: General techniques that could be used to deliver the measure (NB these will vary depending on the site).

Where: Generally where measures could be undertaken. (For optimal locations see the Local Habitat Map).

Further info/guidance: Links to useful supporting information such as case studies, guides and funding options.

Code	Measures	How	Where	Further info/guidance
FL1.1	**Create *permanent*, species-rich and/or structurally diverse grass blocks, strips, margins or headlands to support pollinators and other wildlife.** Unmapped	Creation of permanent grassland blocks, margins, headlands and strips with species and structural diversity. Suitable techniques will depend on whether these are being created on arable land or pasture. On arable, techniques can include seeding, mowing (including removal of arisings). On pasture, techniques are more likely to involve grazing regimes (e.g. mob grazing).	This is good practice across farmland but particularly where greater habitat connectivity is needed and/or to support specific species. Concentrate on connecting these strips, blocks and headlands across land holdings to support larger scale connectivity. Size of buffers, margins, blocks etc, should be sufficient to provide ecological benefit but of a scale that is suitable for the landscape and field size.	Kent Wildlife Trust: Managing field margins for wildlife Agricology: Field margins, hedgerows, woodland and scrub SFI option: CIPM2 Flower-rich grass margins, blocks or in-field strips **Local case studies:** South Downs Farmland Bird Initiative: (storymap)

Code	Enabling Measures
FL1.12 (EM)	Enhance the evidence base for farmland habitats, encouraging and supporting long term monitoring and evidence gathering to inform future interventions to support farmland habitats.

Enabling measures: While not directly focused on creating or improving habitats, these actions play a vital supporting role in delivering the core objectives of the LNRS. Technically out of scope for LNRS delivery, they are included in the document as prompts for wider, collaborative efforts.

What we need to do to support priority habitats in West Sussex (an overview)

Coastal Habitats

C1: Support the expansion, restoration, enhancement and creation of coastal and intertidal habitats.

While many of our most valued coastal habitats (such as sand dunes, saltmarsh, coastal vegetated shingle, mudflats, coastal grazing marsh, seagrass and others) are within protected sites of international importance, they are still fragmented and under pressure from a wide range of sources including climate change, development, poor water quality and so on. Pockets which sit outside of protected sites are often small and very vulnerable to loss and damage.

The LNRS prioritises the restoration and enhancement of our existing coastal habitats with specific actions for each habitat type. It also promotes the creation of new coastal habitat where possible, emphasising the importance of finding suitable locations where they will be resilient to sea level rise (helping habitat to 'migrate') and help to expand or connect existing areas of habitat.

Sand dunes at East Head, West Wittering Beach.

What we need to do to support priority habitats in West Sussex (an overview)

Farmed Landscapes & Soils

FL1. Create and enhance opportunities for wildlife within the farmed landscape.

The farmed landscape makes up a significant part of West Sussex. The LNRS sets out a range of actions that can be taken by farmers and land managers to support habitats and wildlife on their land. These include larger actions such as creating areas of agro-forestry, adding species-rich margins around fields, hedgerows and woodlands, and using sensitive land management practices close to watercourses, through to smaller scale actions such as providing roosting and nesting boxes and pockets of specific habitat to support threatened farmland birds.

SL1. Enhance soil habitats and their health to support biodiversity and improve ecosystem services.

The importance of soils and their management to support soil health and biodiversity is also emphasised. Farmland and soil measures supplement the many other actions in the LNRS for specific habitats (e.g. woodland, rivers, species-rich grassland) that farmers can, and already take to create, maintain and improve habitat types on their land.

Arun Valley

What we need to do to support priority habitats in West Sussex (an overview)

Species-Rich Grassland

G1. Restore, expand, connect and enhance species-rich grasslands.

West Sussex is notable for its species-rich grasslands, which include chalk, waxcap and species-rich neutral grassland, as well as lowland meadows and the acid grassland associated with our heathland areas. Much of this is in small, fragmented pockets which needs management to support its ecological value. The LNRS emphasises actions to do this, but also what needs to be done to create new areas, particularly where this will expand the size of existing sites or provide new connections between them.

The LNRS also highlights the need to manage existing high-quality semi-improved/low input grassland (which may not reach the definition of species-rich grassland but are often the best sites to create new species-rich areas) and to tackle key issues affecting all grasslands such as appropriate grazing levels.

Meadow

What we need to do to support priority habitats in West Sussex (an overview)

Woodland, Scrub and Hedgerows

W1. Enhance our existing woodland habitats improving quality and ecological diversity of habitats, structural diversity and resilience.

As shown in the Local Habitat Map, West Sussex has a significant amount of woodland. Much of it is 'priority' woodland: ancient, rare gill, or wet woodland, traditional orchards or wood pasture and parkland. A large portion is under-managed and in poor condition, and grazing pressure from very high deer populations threaten its future. Given its importance in West Sussex, the key priority is to look after the woodland we have and improve its ecological condition. This includes creating a more diverse age and species structure, re-introducing traditional practices such as coppicing, while addressing fundamental issues such as deer pressure, at scale and across the region.

W2. Create new woodland where this supports connectivity, biodiversity, ecosystem services and landscape character.

There is also room to create new woodland at a small scale. This will be of most benefit where it helps to expand and connect existing woodland and where it will deliver additional site benefits such as slowing the flow of water in the landscape and improving water and air quality. The LNRS approach to creation targets specific woodland types and encourages an approach that is suitable for the site, its landscape character and any archaeological features.

W3. Enhance and expand our urban treescapes, taking opportunities to establish new urban (and urban fringe) woodland and street trees where this will support biodiversity and deliver multiple benefits.

The LNRS emphasises the importance of ancient and veteran trees as well as trees and woodlands within our urban areas. Many West Sussex towns are enhanced by 'treescapes' made up of specific tree species. Some, like elm and ash, are under threat from pests and disease as well as from climate change. The LNRS identifies the need to work within a changing context for our urban woodland and to take action to enhance and expand it for the benefit of people and nature.

Hdg1. Enhance, expand, restore and connect our network of hedgerows.

Hedgerows are a vital habitat in their own right but also create corridors for wildlife across the landscape and deliver multiple benefits for people. Some are ancient and mark the boundaries of ancient fields, others are the remnants of ancient woodlands. Many hedgerows have been lost over time. Some require a change in management to improve their structure and ensure their longevity. The LNRS sets out actions to achieve this and supports the creation of new hedgerows, particularly where these replace those that have been lost, provide new corridors in key locations, support nature-based approaches such as flood risk reduction or provide benefits within new developments.

Scr1. Create and enhance scrub habitats, as edge habitat, as part of habitat mosaics and as a habitat in its own right.

Scrub is valuable for wildlife. It is often found alongside other habitats in a mosaic (with grassland, wetland, woodland for example) and as vital edge habitat along hedges and woodland boundaries. When unmanaged however, it can expand and dominate an area to the detriment of other habitats (such as near rivers valuable to water voles). Actions in the LNRS support its management to enhance existing 'high value' scrub areas (e.g. juniper), control it where it might dominate, and to create new areas of scrub areas along hedgerows, woodland edges and where it will support key species such as specific bird and butterfly species that nest, shelter and find food in scrub habitat.

What we need to do to support priority habitats in West Sussex (an overview)

Lowland Heath and Sandstone Outcrops

H1. Expand, enhance and better connect lowland heathland and associated habitats.

West Sussex contains important areas of lowland heath. The LNRS prioritises the management of these existing areas to improve their ecological condition and create a more resilient habitat structure and diversity of associated habitats (including acid grassland, bare ground, wet heath and heathland ponds). Expanding and connecting areas of lowland heath is also a priority and the LNRS identifies actions to create new areas of heathland particularly where soil and geology are suitable and in sites adjacent to existing heathland areas.

SO1. Enhance the unique biodiversity of the sandstone outcrops of the High Weald.

Sandstone outcrops are associated with the geology of the High Weald. They support rare and very specialised vegetation, most notably lichens, mosses and liverworts. LNRS actions seek to enhance and maintain these important plant communities. They include the management of sites to maintain the environmental conditions needed (such as shade levels and humidity) and the reduction of pressures which may damage sites or their associated biodiversity.

Iping Common features one of the finest examples of lowland heathland in the UK.

What we need to do to support priority habitats in West Sussex (an overview)

Rivers, Streams & Aquifers

R1. Support the recovery of our rivers and river systems, their health, biodiversity and natural functions.

The rivers of West Sussex and their wider river systems (tributaries, streams and channels) are already a focus of significant effort and concern, not just for the role they play in supporting nature but because of their importance to and impact on people. The LNRS aligns with priorities within river basin management plans and catchment management plans to highlight the actions needed at a range of scales to support the recovery of rivers, their health, biodiversity and natural functions. These include actions to help reconnect rivers to their floodplains, to improve 'in-river' connectivity (e.g. by removing barriers to fish) and restoring and enhancing habitats along and within their channels.

The LNRS also highlights the importance of natural flood management and other techniques to help slow the flow of water through the landscape and of establishing vegetation buffer strips alongside rivers and streams to help intercept pollutants originating from adjacent land. It also flags the importance of tackling runoff from roads and highways into our rivers and the need for a strategic approach to the control of invasive non-native species (INNS) affecting the river system.

R2. Support the recovery and resilience of our chalk streams and their unique biodiversity.

West Sussex contains numerous chalk streams. These are globally rare and support a unique biodiversity but are increasingly vulnerable to a range of pressures. Chalk streams are identified as a specific priority within this LNRS with actions identified to help sustain their base flows in times of drought, encourage buffer habitats along their length and restore their natural function.

A1. Support the health and function of our aquifers.

A significant part of West Sussex sits on chalk aquifers. These provide ground water supplies for much of our population. The future health and function of these aquifers is of great concern, and work is ongoing to highlight the need to manage land and habitats to help support the aquifers beneath them. The LNRS contains actions that can benefit nature and contribute to long-term aquifer health including creating habitats and using land management practices that support aquifer recharge and reduce chemicals reaching ground water, as well as the creation and use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) where suitable.

River Arun, Arundel.

What we need to do to support priority habitats in West Sussex (an overview)

Wetlands and Standing Water Bodies

Wt1. Restore and enhance our existing wetland habitats and create new wetlands particularly where this will expand and connect existing sites.

The wetlands of West Sussex support biodiversity while also delivering a range of benefits for people. Some are designated specifically for the wetland species they support. All require a well-functioning hydrological system to survive and are increasingly vulnerable to pressures such as drought and pollution. The LNRS sets out the actions needed to support each of the types of wetland we find here. Across all, this includes enhancing their condition through management that supports their hydrological function and water levels, manages other vegetation and removes pressures such as invasive species. The LNRS also identifies opportunities to create new areas of wetland such as reedbed and wet grassland, particularly where this will expand and connect existing areas of these habitats and deliver wider environmental benefits (such as improved water quality).

SWB1. Restore and enhance existing standing water bodies (reservoirs, lakes, ponds and ditches) and create new standing water body habitat for biodiversity and other benefits.

Lakes, reservoirs, ditches and many types of ponds are found throughout West Sussex and are invaluable for the contribution they make to nature as well as their cumulative impact across a landscape. Many ponds and ditches are in poor ecological condition, with their small size making them more vulnerable to pollution, siltation, drought, urbanisation and the impact of nearby land use. The LNRS sets out actions to enhance and restore the various types of standing water bodies, including creating buffers of vegetation along ditches and ponds to intercept pollutants. It also encourages the creation of new ponds and pond networks for biodiversity in suitable locations, and new lakes and reservoirs where the opportunity arises, as well as the design of ambitious areas of adjacent riparian habitat to support species.

The lapwing is an iconic farmland and wetland bird.

What we need to do to support priority habitats in West Sussex (an overview)

Urban Nature

U1. Create and connect new nature-rich areas within our villages, towns and cities, for the benefit of wildlife and people.

This LNRS identifies the importance of taking specific action to support nature in our urban areas. This is for nature's sake and also because of the role nature in towns and cities plays in supporting air quality, water quality, temperature regulation and improving our quality of life, health and wellbeing. While it is difficult to create new natural greenspaces at scale within urban areas, the LNRS identifies the need to do this where possible and to take smaller scale opportunities to retrofit nature (such as green roofs and walls) into our public realm. The LNRS also identifies the option of re-naturalising stretches of our urban rivers and streams as this supports biodiversity while opening up new access to greenspace for local people.

U2. Enhance the value for nature of existing parks, buildings and other blue/green spaces.

Urgent action is also needed to create more opportunities for nature within our existing green and blue spaces (foreshore, parks, gardens, churchyards, schools, allotments, golf courses and so on). The LNRS identifies the option of re-naturalising stretches of our urban rivers and streams as this supports biodiversity while opening up new access to greenspace for local people. Smaller scale work to support species, such as providing bat and bird boxes, is encouraged, as is reduced use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides on publicly owned land.

Green corridors in Burgess Hill. © Diana Alcroft

What we need to do to support priority habitats in West Sussex (an overview)

Nature Networks: Protected Sites, Wildlife Corridors and more habitat for wildlife

An important aspect of the West Sussex LNRS is that it includes measures not related to a specific habitat type but instead to actions that make a strategic contribution to the creation of a nature network across the area. While it is not always possible to prescribe the precise habitat actions needed in all locations, in practice we know where and how we need to act to bring the principle of bigger, better, more and joined-up to life. The LNRS is also about supporting the ambitious and important action already happening in West Sussex so that this is embedded in any future approach to nature at the county scale.

PS1. Support the expansion and enhancement of a network of protected sites.

Actions here set out the need to support our protected sites and enhance their ecological function, such as by improving the condition of local wildlife sites, and by creating wide buffers of habitat and sensitive land use around them and stepping stones between them.

Cor1. Enable landscape recovery at scale across landscapes and large-scale nature corridors where this supports biodiversity, ecosystem services and landscape character.

Cor2. Safeguard and enhance the value of existing green and blue corridors for nature and create new corridors and stepping stones of habitat where this will improve connectivity between habitats and between rural and urban green spaces.

Creating and enhancing corridors for wildlife (as championed by the two priorities above) ensures greater connectivity between habitats and sites. Actions range from supporting ambitious, landscape-scale wildlife corridors (such as those identified in local plans or being set up by landowners) through to community corridors within neighbourhoods and villages driven by community groups.

Cor3. Enhance transport corridors, verges, historic routeways and footpath networks for wildlife.

Actions work to improve nature corridors along our roads, railways, trails and footpaths. They also recognise the importance of the appropriate management of verges, whether these are already designated for their wildlife value or are those that local communities wish to manage.

MH1. Create new areas of mixed habitats or habitat mosaics (of habitat types prioritised within the LNRS) to expand the area of high quality wildlife habitat across the nature network.

Whether a community project, a habitat bank or even the restoration of an old mineral site, actions to support this priority are not single habitat in their focus. Instead, they set out to create a rich variety of habitats that are suitable at the site level or come forward through a rewilding approach. Often a focus for communities, they have been included so that the LNRS is a home for these sorts of actions.

The Weald to Waves vision. Founded by farmers and now a movement, Weald to Waves seeks to establish a 100-mile nature corridor across Sussex.

What we need to do to support priority habitats in West Sussex (an overview)

Nature and Health

NH1. Create new areas of natural greenspace designed and located to deliver benefits for health and wellbeing while enhancing biodiversity.

Spending time in nature can provide benefits to our health and wellbeing and the actions here recognise this link. While they are not concerned with how to connect people to nature (as this is beyond the LNRS's remit), they do include creating new greenspaces specifically designed to support health and wellbeing. They also acknowledge that across the health system in West Sussex opportunities to create such spaces are beginning to emerge within the NHS estate, community gardens, public parks and so on.

© Julio Lopez/unsplash.com

The Local Habitat Map and how to navigate it

The Local Habitat Map shows where the measures identified in Part 2 of the LNRS could be taken across West Sussex to deliver the greatest benefits for nature and the wider environment.

It gives a sense of how and where nature could be recovered to create more of our important habitats or to expand, improve or join up existing habitats. It also shows how this could fit around our existing protected sites (our core areas) for nature.

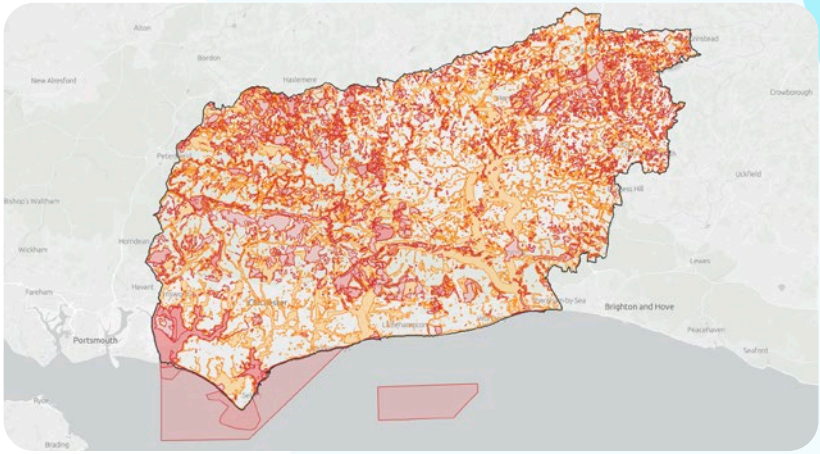
How to use the map

There are three categories of layer in the Local Habitat Map:

1. **Where protected and important sites for nature are located** i.e. designated sites and irreplaceable habitats. This layer is known as the *APIB – Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity.*
2. **A single layer with all measures merged together**, excluding the area covered by the APIB. This is called the *ACIB – Areas that Could become of Importance for Biodiversity.*
3. **Individual measures (actions for nature) grouped by habitat** e.g. coastal, woodland, species-rich grassland, urban. These are switched off when you open the map.

Find details about LNRS measures in the map

Click on a measure on the map (a coloured area) to bring up a box of further information. This has the Measure Code (e.g. G1.1 Enhance chalk grassland) and some guidance about how to implement it. It also shows which of our priority species could benefit from the measure.



Check the West Sussex Local Habitat Map to see if there are any measures on or near land that you might own, manage or advise on. This is useful if you're considering creating or restoring habitats to support nature's recovery.

But note, not all measures have been mapped – so check Part 2.

Some measures can't be mapped because either they could be done in many places (for example, creating a permanent species-rich buffer strip can be done on any arable land) or because we don't have enough data to say where the best locations are (for example, as there is no existing dataset for scrub in West Sussex, we can't map the best places to create or enhance scrub).

If you don't see any mapped measures on or near land you're interested in, check Part 2 for many other actions that could be taken to support nature.

Remember – there is no obligation to carry out any measure, mapped or otherwise.

Priority Species in West Sussex

West Sussex is rich in wildlife. 14,390 species have been recorded here in the last 20 years – everything from diatoms (single celled algae) to mammals. 20% of these are of conservation concern, meaning they are rare, threatened or declining, and nearly 3.5% are legally protected.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies support species by planning for more of the habitats they depend on, and making these bigger, better, and more joined-up with each other. They are, therefore, a new way to help achieve a national goal of increasing the abundance of our species and reducing the risk of their extinction.

However, some species need actions over and above those related to habitats. In the main, these are the species on our Priority Species list which was developed following months of data collation and review, working with the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre and local and national experts.

How the Priority Species list was developed

We started with a longlist of 899 species of conservation concern.

166 of these have been selected as Priority Species. Of these:

- 115 were grouped into 19 assemblages (species that share similar management requirements).
- 51 require their own bespoke measures.

339 locally important species will be well supported by our LNRS habitat measures and so did not make the shortlist.

The remaining species were not shortlisted because:

- they are no longer likely to be present in our LNRS area, or
- we do not know enough about their decline, population or range, or
- they are relatively common so not a priority for on-the-ground action.

A few Priority List species

Adder

An iconic species of the Downs, adders are on the brink of extinction, with 90% of their few remaining populations in decline. While adders will be supported by habitats improvements, bespoke measures, such as the construction of hibernacula are also required.

Water vole

A flagship species for rivers and wetland, it is estimated we have lost 90% of our water voles in the last 30 years. Specific measures needed to support them include eradication of the non-native invasive species American mink.

Hedgehog

Hedgehog populations have declined significantly in recent decades but urban gardens can provide an important refuge. Hedgehogs were the most popular species from our public surveys and seen as a champion species for urban habitats. Specific measures include improving connectivity between gardens.

Greater mouse-eared bat

The rarest bat in Britain, just two individuals have been recorded within the South Downs National Park in West Sussex. Though no longer officially counted as a resident species, a single male was found hibernating in 2023, and a second bat (excitingly - an adult breeding female) was recorded in the same area in 2025. This brings hope that they could bounce back from extinction, so it is vital that the LNRS supports its recovery.

For the full list of Priority Species, see Part 3 of the West Sussex LNRS

Adder © iStock.com/MikeLane45; Water vole © iStock.com/Rachel Bennett; Hedgehog © iStock.com/slowmotiongli; Greater mouse-eared bat © iStock.com/Remus86

How you can use the LNRS to support nature's recovery

Everyone in West Sussex can take part in helping to recover nature.

Some of the ways you can use this LNRS	
Residents & Communities	• Understand the priorities for nature in your local area. • Find actions within the measures you can take forward. • Explore how your actions could make an important contribution to a broader county-wide ambition for nature.
Farmers and land managers	• As a resource to help you make decisions about creating or improving habitats on your land, particularly in places less suited to food production. • Identify a range of actions, case studies and further guidance to improve or create habitats, manage soil or provide wider environmental benefits. • To support applications for funding.
Local Authorities	• Inform and evidence Local Plans and policies. • Understand how and where Nature-based Solutions can be used to best effect to provide benefits for nature and people. • Inform how to manage council land to deliver LNRS measures.
Environmental sector	• To align the sector's efforts, by providing a wider context and a mechanism through which to coordinate and direct action at all scales. • As a benchmark for future trends and effectiveness of actions. • To give funders, investors and landowners confidence in the actions and locations that will deliver the greatest benefits for nature.
Protected Landscapes	• Support their efforts to drive the recovery of nature within their boundaries. • Provide additional information to support their own evidence base. • Inspire the creation of projects or initiatives to support nature's recovery.
Developers	• Better understand the location of any new/proposed development in relation to its wider environment, habitats and species, and reflect this in the design and delivery of biodiversity on-site. • Help plan suitable habitat creation as part of developments.

Next steps

Following publication in June 2026, the West Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy transitions from preparation to delivery.

West Sussex County Council (as the appointed Responsible Authority) will play a key role in helping to coordinate delivery to turn ambition into action and help drive nature's recovery forward.

Key tasks will include:

- Convening and leading a partnership to guide the delivery of the LNRS, with the Sussex Nature Partnership at its heart.
- Strengthening links within West Sussex County Council and with Supporting Authorities, to embed the LNRS in Spatial Development Strategies, Local Plans, public health initiatives and climate resilience and adaptation programmes.
- Identifying, developing and publicising high-impact projects that advance LNRS priorities and showcase best practice.
- Tracking activities and projects delivering LNRS priorities and sharing progress with Natural England.

To find out more and get involved, visit SussexNatureRecovery.org.uk or sign up for our newsletters.

Sussex Nature Recovery

A collective blueprint for targeted action

West Sussex
Local Nature Recovery Strategy
Statement of Biodiversity Priorities
Part 1 – Context & Description of Strategy Area

West Sussex
Local Nature Recovery Strategy
Statement of Biodiversity Priorities
Part 2 – Priorities, Measures and the Local Habitat Map

West Sussex
Local Nature Recovery Strategy
Statement of Biodiversity Priorities
Part 3 – Priority Species

West Sussex, East Sussex and
Brighton & Hove
Local Nature Recovery Strategy
Statement of Biodiversity Priorities
Part 4 – Technical Methods

View all the documents at:

SussexNatureRecovery.org.uk

west sussex county council

June 2026