

Horsham District Council's Biodiversity Report – First Consideration

01st January 2024 – 01st January 2026

Background

The Environment Act 2021 introduced a strengthened 'biodiversity duty' which requires all public authorities in England to consider what action they can take to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Horsham District Council (HDC) therefore must:

1. Consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
2. Agree policies and specific objectives based on their 'first consideration'.
3. Act to deliver the policies and achieve their objectives.

For our first consideration, this report sets out what action we intend to take to enhance biodiversity within the district. This report is to be published by 1st January 2024. The actions can be reviewed at any point, but these actions must be reconsidered within five years.

Following the initial consideration, HDC must agree the policies and objectives based on the first consideration as soon as possible, act on these, and prepare the first formal Biodiversity Report for publication by 1st January 2026, with subsequent reports published every five years thereafter. The Biodiversity Report will illustrate how HDC is helping to improve nature recovery and the progress towards achieving our objectives, and in doing so complying with our biodiversity duty.

Action that HDC takes aims to contribute towards the national goals and targets on biodiversity, as part of the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP23).

By 2030, the government has committed to:

- Halt the decline in species abundance, and
- Protect 30% of UK land.

By 2042, the government has committed to:

- Increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels,
- Restore or create at least 500,000 ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats,
- Reduce the risk of species extinction, and
- Restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term.

Biodiversity Report contents

Mandatory

By law, the Biodiversity Report produced in 2026 must include:

- A summary of the action taken to comply with our biodiversity duty
- The policies and objectives we have set to meet the biodiversity duty
- The actions we have completed, either alone or in partnership with others, that benefit biodiversity.

- Explain how HDC has taken account of local nature recovery strategies (LNRS), protected site strategies, and species conservation strategies.
- How HDC plan to comply with the biodiversity duty in the next reporting period
- The actions carried out to meet biodiversity net gain obligations.
- Details of biodiversity net gains resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans we have approved.
- How HDC plan to meet biodiversity net gain obligations in the next reporting period.

Optional

In addition, HDC can also provide additional optional information, for example:

- Summarise what HDC has achieved in the reporting period, and explain how our policies, objectives and actions have contributed toward conserving, restoring, and enhancing biodiversity and protected sites, noting the successes and challenges.
- How we may have addressed the main causes of biodiversity loss e.g., land use changes, invasive non-native species, pollution
- Any action taken within areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONB)
- Information on how complying with our biodiversity net gain obligations relates to other obligations.
- Adding quantitative data to the report, that has helped monitor and evaluate the results of the actions taken.
- Include boundary data for areas of HDC owned and/or managed land that are important for biodiversity.
- Describe if land that is HDC owned and/or managed is identified in the LNRS and at what level of importance.
- Describe what has been done to raise awareness, educate, and advise on how to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Explain how we have measured our actions and assessed their effects on biodiversity.
- Any relevant environmental assessments that we are responsible for, such as the strategies environmental assessment of the local plan, or local transport, minerals, or waste plans.
- Report on significant trends or areas of concern that HDC have found.
- Explain what we envisage to be the main challenges over the next 5 years.

Biodiversity within Horsham District

Horsham District supports a variety of habitats and species, ranging from large areas of ancient woodland in the north, to chalky grassland and floodplains in the south. There are two main rivers that run through the district, River Adur and River Arun, and the area is home to many protected sites and landscapes, for example the Arun Valley (SAC, SPA, Ramsar), High Weald National Landscape (AONB), South Downs National Park, Warnham Local Nature Reserve (LNR) as well as 23 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and 71 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). In the centre of the district lies the Knepp Estate, a large rewilding project that has gained national recognition, which has become a breeding hotspot for rare and endangered species, such as the nightingale and turtle dove.

Across Horsham District, there are a multitude of external projects underway with aims to enhance local biodiversity. For example, the Weald to Waves project has a mission to create a nationally significant wildlife corridor measuring 100 miles in length, starting from Ashdown Forest and branching off along three rivers to reach different points of the Sussex coast to connect the kelp forests in our coastal waters. In doing so, wildlife will be able to move across the landscape, ultimately boosting biodiversity and increasing resilience to climate change, whilst also offering other ecosystem services and natural capital such as carbon capture and enhancing food production.

Similarly, the Adur River Restoration Project aims to revitalise and restore the River Adur and its catchment, creating a new ribbon of habitats running through a wildlife-friendly farmed landscape. In the south of the District there is also the Changing Chalk multi-partner, multi-project initiative led by the National Trust. Its aim is to restore lost habitats, bring histories to life, and provide new experiences in the outdoors. It seeks to connect nature, people, and heritage across a 458sqkm area of the eastern South Downs.

HDC functions relevant to the Biodiversity Duty

Land and Property

There is the need to consider how the land that is directly managed by HDC, could conserve and enhance biodiversity. This includes green and blue spaces like:

- allotments
- cemeteries
- parks and sports fields
- amenity spaces and communal gardens
- roadside and railway verges
- field margins and hedgerows
- rights of way and access routes
- woodlands and nature reserves
- canals and rivers
- water-dependent habitats
- estuaries

In the preparation of our Biodiversity Report, HDC will review how our landholdings are managed to enhance the environment and create habitats for wildlife that connect to other existing habitats. It is also advised to consider how we will monitor the ongoing biodiversity value. Where large areas of land are available, it is advised that we should examine the

promotion of nature-based solutions, restoration of natural processes, and landscape recovery. HDC should also think about incorporating space for wildlife on any HDC owned buildings and grounds.

Protected Sites

Sites that HDC own or manage are sometimes protected by other environmental legislation. For example:

- sites of special scientific interest (SSSI)
- special areas of conservation (SPA) or special protection areas (SPA)
- national nature reserves (NNR)
- local nature reserves (LNR) or local wildlife sites (LWS)
- Ramsar sites (wetlands of international importance)

HDC is aware of the status of its owned land via GIS mapping systems. Designated sites within our ownership are already subject to management plans which ensure that the land is being managed for biodiversity purposes.

This will need to be reviewed and updated to ensure that HDC is in accordance with the EIP23 which sets the expectation that all public authorities should ensure they have management plans in place by the end of 2023 to support their sites to reach favourable status. Authorities should produce those plans and work actively with Natural England and others to identify and implement the actions needed to improve site condition.

Protected Landscapes

HDC is also required to consider its role in relation to national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) as part of their biodiversity duty. This is important as HDC have functions in or close to national parks and AONBs. Improving nature in national parks or AONBs is an action that can enhance and conserve biodiversity. HDC can comply with its biodiversity duty by:

- Continuing to help develop and implement management plans for national parks and AONBs
- Making improvements to nature in these areas

Educate, Advise, and Raise Awareness

Helping the public to understand biodiversity and why it's important, and encouraging land managers, businesses, and the general public to take action to benefit and enhance it, can form part of the biodiversity duty.

For HDC policies, objectives and actions, we will consider how we:

- Include the public in projects to improve biodiversity
- Feature biodiversity in public or internal communications
- Use libraries and museums to raise awareness of biodiversity

- Put information boards in green space or offer guided walks
- Include biodiversity considerations in advice for internal and external clients and service users
- Educate staff on your biodiversity actions and why they're important
- Raise public awareness of how their gardens can support biodiversity, for example by avoiding artificial grass.

Policies and Processes

All public authorities have internal policies and processes for staff and facilities that could affect biodiversity. HDC will consider how our policies may affect biodiversity and seek to review and improve these for better outcomes. Example policies include:

- Transport – support sustainable travel to reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality
- Waste – review waste management and recycling processes to reduce water pollution and air pollution from waste transport and landfill
- Water – improve water efficiency to reduce the effect water abstraction can have on sensitive habitats and species
- Procurement – buy sustainable materials and supplies to reduce the demand on natural resources
- Light – make sure the design of artificial lightning minimises effects on nature

Planning Services and Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to development or land management that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. National advice suggests that where BNG is currently not a policy within the local plan, Local Authorities could consider preparing one. HDC is pursuing this approach.

The Environment Act requires that future development projects (apart from exempt developments) will need to achieve a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain. This will be on a phased rollout with major developments being mandatory from January 2024, minor developments from April 2024 and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) being brought into the system by November 2025.

HDC will need to report what is done for BNG on and off development sites. Therefore, we will consider areas that are appropriate for BNG, and how existing planning advice and strategies can protect and enhance biodiversity.

Biodiversity data – Local Environmental Record Centre

Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre (SxBRC) has an important role with assisting HDC in meeting their statutory duties in relation to ecological data, but also holds much of the data needed to help understand our duty, monitor change, and provide data for the purposes of the biodiversity duty report.

Going forward, HDC will need to consider how to further utilise SxBRC data alongside other sources of data and present them in future reports. Environmental assessment regulations require monitoring of the effects of development plans and projects. The results of this monitoring could be used as a source of environmental data.

HDC's current position

As indicated above, HDC are already undertaking many actions to ensure we comply with our biodiversity duty. The recent Council Plan 2023-2027 has introduced the 'Inspiring greener futures' theme and identified methods to reduce carbon emissions and use of natural resources to achieve Net Zero by 2050 as key priorities.

Management schemes on HDC owned land, in which many sites have been designated as Local Wildlife Sites, are managed to maintain and enhance biodiversity, with 'No Mow' areas to be expanded as part of a trial from 2024. The Council have membership of the High Weald Joint Advisory committee, who oversee the management of the High Weald AONB landscape, and HDC contributes to the preparation of the High Weald National Landscape AONB management plan.

The impacts on the objectives and special qualities of the AONB, alongside other protected sites (SSSI's, Ramsar, SAC, SPA, NNR, LNR, and LWS) are always assessed when determining planning applications. In addition, the impacts of any development on the site and adjoining areas are also taken into account, irrespective of any specific designation.

HDC are in the process of preparing a new Local Plan 2023-2040, whereby new policies relating to biodiversity, including biodiversity net gain and water neutrality, are embedded to prevent adverse impacts on wildlife sites and promote nature recovery and enhancement.

The Council are also actively involved in several environmental projects, in partnership with other organisations, such as the Wilder Horsham District, a five-year partnership between HDC and Sussex Wildlife Trust with aspirations to create a Nature Recovery Network across the District.

These examples, together with others are summarised in Table 1 below. This table also sets out potential further actions in accordance with the requirements to set out our first considerations.

Table 1 First Considerations: Summary of current actions and further considerations towards the biodiversity duty

Work Area	Detail	First Considerations: Current position	Further work /actions/ next steps (and timescale)	Method of monitoring
Corporate actions	Council Plan	<p>One of the four themes of the Council Plan 2023 – 2027 is ‘Inspiring greener futures’. The priorities include creating nature diverse places for people to live in, investigating the benefits and opportunities for BNG and carbon credits for HDC and landowners within the district, and supporting methods towards achieving net zero by 2050 by encouraging switching to greener technologies, and cutting carbon emissions and water usage.</p> <p>Sustainable procurement which includes taking biodiversity into account in relevant procurement processes, to reduce the demand on natural resources.</p>	<p>Annual Plan 2024 – 2025: Establish wildlife corridors across the District by adjusting mowing regime.</p> <p>Annual Plan (2023 – 2024) Support development of LNRS.</p> <p>Consider next steps for Wilder Horsham District Initiative.</p> <p>Setting ambitious environmental standards/requirements through the Local Plan, and promoting Net Zero by engaging with communities, assisting residents and business with insulation of buildings, further developing the Parish and Neighbourhood Climate Action Network, developing a Sustainable Business Network, starting groundwork for a residential retrofit programme to reduce energy and water consumption, and rolling out the emerging Climate Action Strategy.</p>	Corporate monitoring and reporting Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Work Area	Detail	First Considerations: Current position	Further work /actions/ next steps (and timescale)	Method of monitoring
Parks & countryside / estates	Land stewardship	<p>HDC owned sites designated as LWS: Warnham Nature Reserve, Southwater Country Park, Owlbeech & Leechpool Woods, Chesworth Farm, Sandgate Park, Henfield, Broadmare and Oreham Commons, Denne Road cemetery, Bramber Brooks. Monkmead Woods part of SSSI</p> <p>All these sites managed to maintain and enhance biodiversity.</p>	<p>HDC also aims to switch over Horsham town centre cleansing vehicles from diesel to electric and buy four electric vans to replace the diesel vehicles in the Recycling and Waste Service, and support WSCC initiatives to install EV charge points throughout the District.</p> <p>Agree council policy for all new strategic development sites to be designed as 15-minute walkable neighbourhoods.</p>	Programme of Management reviews with timetable for review and reporting against progress.
	Greenspace strategy	Draft management principles to be adopted across HDC estate.	<p>Review of pesticide use 2024-25</p> <p>Review of peat usage 20-24-25</p> <p>Review of Livestock grazing 2024-25</p>	Publication of reports, and progress towards identified targets

Work Area	Detail	First Considerations: Current position	Further work /actions/ next steps (and timescale)	Method of monitoring
			Review of species reintroduction potential	
	Enhancement of existing sites	Areas of meadow grassland / no mow areas to be expanded in trial between 2024-26	Seek proactive approach to woodland management e.g., coppicing, where possible	Area of grassland specified for cuts. Completion of relevant management plans
Protected sites and landscapes	Sites of Special Scientific Importance (SSSI)	Monkmead Woods, part of Hurston Warren SSSI	Requires new management plan to be completed 2026-27.	
	Local Wildlife Sites: LWS Initiative	HDC subscribes to the Sussex Local Wildlife Sites Initiative operated by the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre. This operates across the whole of Sussex helping to ensure a consistent approach.	Seek to ensure LWS continue to be reviewed and support the designation of new sites especially those integral to the LNRS. Warnham and Denne Cemetery management plans for approval in 2024 Owlbeech & Leechpool Woods by end of 2024	Next Biodiversity Report (2026)
	High Weald National Landscape: High Weald AONB management plan	HDC is an active member of the Officer Support Group (OSG) and has a Councillor representative on the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC). Supports the review of the management plan. Determine planning applications which considers the objectives and special qualities of this designated landscape.	The Officer Support Group (OSG) meets twice a year. The High Weald JAC meets twice a year. Consultation for the review of the management plan 2024-2029 closed on 5 th November 2023. Further input into the	Meeting minutes. Management Plan updates. Local Plan policies. Relevant guidance documents.

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		<p>Work with the High Weald AONB on biodiversity enhancement projects that within this designated landscape and the Horsham District.</p>	<p>plan if required through the Officer Support Group.</p> <p>Ongoing decision making which takes into account the current HW AONB management plan and the ambitions and environmental requirements of the emerging HDC Local Plan.</p>	
	<p>South Downs National Park (SDNP)</p>	<p>HDC is not the planning authority for the National Park. The SDNP currently delegates the determination of certain planning applications to HDC. Where development proposals adjoin or could otherwise impact the SNDP, the determination of planning applications considers the objectives and special qualities of this designated landscape.</p> <p>Work with the Park Authority on biodiversity enhancement projects that lie within the Park and the Horsham District.</p>	<p>Ongoing decision making which considers the environmental policies of the South Downs Local Plan and technical advice notes and the environmental requirements of the emerging HDC Local Plan.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p> <p>Authority Monitoring Report.</p>
<p>Planning</p>	<p>Preparation of new HDC Local Plan</p>	<p>The Horsham District Local Plan 2023-2040 Regulation 19 was approved at Council on the 11th December 2023 for Publication and followed by Submission. Its policies require the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and Strategic Policy 17 'Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity'</p>	<p>The Regulation 19 formal six-week consultation: 19th January to 1st March 2024.</p> <p>HDC expects to submit the Local Plan to the Secretary of State in June 2024 for formal Examination, with the Inspector's Report anticipated</p>	<p>Adoption of new Local Plan Authority Monitoring Report (published annually), and next Biodiversity Report (2026)</p>

Work Area	Detail	First Considerations: Current position	Further work /actions/ next steps (and timescale)	Method of monitoring
		<p>sets a requirement for qualifying development to meet 12% BNG.</p> <p>The Water Neutrality Policy 9 requires applicants to demonstrate the development is water neutral, in attempts to prevent further negative impacts that water abstraction has on the protected wildlife sites within the Arun Valley. HDC have contributed towards the Sussex North Water Offsetting Scheme (SNOWS) in collaboration with other authorities, which enables applicants to purchase water credits to offset the water use of their developments in order to meet the requirements of Policy 9 above.</p>	<p>to be published in Spring 2025 enabling adoption in Summer 2025.</p>	
	Green Infrastructure Strategy	<p>HDC produced a Green Infrastructure Strategy in 2014. It is being subject to review.</p>	<p>HDC seeks to publish an updated Green Infrastructure in January 2024 to sit alongside the background evidence to the Local Plan.</p>	<p>Publication of revised strategy</p>
	Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure Planning Advice Note (PAN)	<p>HDC produced a Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure (PAN) in October 2022 primarily to provide interim guidance prior to the mandatory 10% BNG coming into force (now expected January 2024)</p>	<p>Some aspects of the note may be by the BNG Regulations and Guidance in January 2024, and in due course by the adoption of the revised Local Plan</p>	<p>N/A</p>

Work Area	Detail	First Considerations: Current position	Further work /actions/ next steps (and timescale)	Method of monitoring
	Biodiversity Net Gain	<p>Employed Ecology Officer to prepare planning teams for BNG implementation and review BNG as part of planning applications.</p> <p>Attending Sussex LNRS working group and supporting authorities' meetings.</p> <p>In the absence of the LNRS, determining areas of high and medium strategic significance, specifically BOAs and river corridors as found in the GI Strategy, and ecologically desirable areas identified within the Wilder Horsham District Nature Recovery Network (NRN).</p> <p>Investigation of opportunities to work with partners (such as the SDNP) and own land holdings to deliver off site BNG units.</p>	<p>Develop internal BNG monitoring processes (Early 2024)</p> <p>Mapping of BNG sites and create maps to be submitted within biodiversity duty report (Mid 2024+)</p> <p>New webpage on HDC website and wider BNG communication to help members of the public and developers understand new BNG requirements. (January 2024 to mid-2024)</p>	<p>As part of our statutory duty, reviewing BNG monitoring reports submitted in association with planning applications within 30-year (or more) period (January 2024+).</p> <p>BNG on- and off-site information recorded (and progress submitted in Biodiversity Report (published in 2026)).</p>

Work Area	Detail	First Considerations: Current position	Further work /actions/ next steps (and timescale)	Method of monitoring
	<p>Determination of planning applications in accordance with current wildlife legislation and policy.</p>	<p>Employed Ecology Officer to assist with ecology consultations relating to strategic sites, such as reviewing EIAs, HRAs and Ecology reports.</p> <p>The Mens SAC and Ebernoe Common SAC has functionally linked land that covers much of the western half of the District (Bat Sustenance Zone). Continued review of planning applications that must include assessment of all impacts if the site lies within 6.5km from SAC, or significant impacts or severance to flightlines if within 12km.</p> <p>Continued duty to enhance and protect SSSI's and complying with policy and legislation to conserve protected sites i.e., SAC, SPA, NNR, LNR, LWS, and Ramsar sites.</p>	<p>Continue to review planning applications in line with current wildlife legislation and relevant Local Plan policy, and professional best practice (and any subsequent updates).</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p>
<p>Environmental partnership projects</p>	<p>Wilder Horsham District</p>	<p>This is a five-year partnership between Horsham District Council and the Sussex Wildlife Trust (it commenced in 2020). This significant project works closely with local communities and landowners to reverse the decline in wildlife by creating and connecting habitats to deliver a Nature Recovery Network for the Horsham District.</p> <p>The Council pays for two full time landowner advisers and one part-time</p>	<p>Review the project in 2024/25 to determine how it may continue and what form it will take going forward, learning from what has been delivered to date.</p> <p>Ongoing contact with landowners, community groups and Parish/Neighbourhood Councils.</p>	<p>The project is overseen by a Steering Group consisting of representation from the Council and the Trust. This monitors progress against performance indicators and</p>

Work Area	Detail	First Considerations: Current position	Further work /actions/ next steps (and timescale)	Method of monitoring
		<p>project support officer. These are employed by the Trust.</p> <p>The objectives of the project are: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help wildlife thrive across the Horsham District. • Create networks of land that are 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 that protecting and enhancing wildlife brings for climate change mitigation and adaptation. <p>An aspirational Nature Recovery Network (NRN) has been mapped for the district https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/get-involved/community-projects/wilder-horsham/horsham-district-nature-recovery-network. This helps direct the work of the project. In the absence of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy</p>	<p>Use of social media, and Council, as well as the Wildlife Trust publications to promote the project, and what it is achieving.</p>	<p>deliverables in the contract.</p>

Work Area	Detail	First Considerations: Current position	Further work /actions/ next steps (and timescale)	Method of monitoring
		<p>this map will be used to direct off-site BNG.</p> <p>The project supports bespoke and, largely, in-person advice to landowners and farmers on changes they can make to land management for the benefit of wildlife. A significant number of landowners have already received advice over the last three years. The project also gives advice to community groups, as well as Parish and Neighbourhood Councils on the role they can play in enhancing biodiversity. This can either be on their own land or by working with their local communities, such as creating pollinator highways. Two workshops were held for Parish and Neighbourhood Councils with practical advice on what actions they can take.</p> <p>The landowner and community strands are supported by a grant scheme, known as the Nature Recovery Award. This provides grants of up to £5k towards projects that enhance biodiversity and contribute to the delivery of a nature recovery network.</p> <p>Volunteer work parties, run by the project team, can also provide practical</p>		

Work Area	Detail	First Considerations: Current position	Further work /actions/ next steps (and timescale)	Method of monitoring
		<p>support for landowners, such as hedge laying and clearing invasive species.</p> <p>As part of this project the Council is seeking to ensure that the principles of the project are embedded throughout the organisation. Part of this has been through staff and Member talks/presentations, as well as work with key departments, such as planning and parks and countryside. The latter team already manages its key countryside sites to enhance biodiversity. However, management regimes across the estate have been reviewed and updated where possible. Council land has been mapped alongside the NRN. This shows opportunities to work with landowners neighbouring Council land which it could work with to start developing local NRN's.</p> <p>The final part of the project is to promote biodiversity enhancement to the wider community. This is through talks, press releases and articles in the Council magazine. These also include actions that individuals can take to enhance biodiversity in their own gardens, however small these maybe.</p>		

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	River Adur Recovery Project	<p>HDC is a partner in this pilot Landscape Recovery project (a strand under the Environmental Land Management Scheme). The first two years of DEFRA funding is for the development phase. The funding is mostly to complete studies across 27 landholdings to understand land management changes that could be implemented to revitalise and restore the river and its floodplain.</p> <p>https://www.adur-river-recovery.org/</p>	<p>During the next year the landowners will have received their reports on changes they can make to their land. This will be followed by workshops with the landowners to develop a shared vision of the changes that could be made along the river.</p> <p>A series of community events will be used to explain the project and what may changes make take place to the river.</p>	<p>Reports from Adur Recovery Project as appropriate.</p>
	Weald to Waves	<p>HDC is a partner in this project that is led by the Knepp Wildlife Foundation to create a nature recovery corridor. The aspiration is for this to extend from the Sussex coast up the River Arun and the River Adur (as well as the River Ouse in East Sussex) via St Leonards Forest to Ashdown Forest. The corridor covers 20,00ha and is over 100 miles in length. Much of this lies within the Horsham District.</p> <p>https://www.wealdtowaves.co.uk/</p>	<p>Continue to obtain pledges from landowners and individuals (gardens) to be part of the wildlife corridor.</p>	<p>Reports from Weald to Wave Project as appropriate.</p>