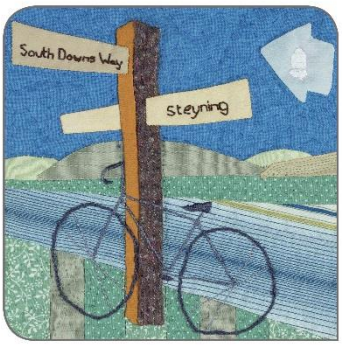

Ecology & biodiversity

STEYNING'S COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

Published on: 22 November 2019

Prepared to inform and support the Steyning Neighbourhood Plan

More information available at www.steyningcommunityplan.co.uk

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1 Introduction

1.1.1 This report has been prepared by Paul Maidment and Ryan Maidment, members of the Steyning Community Plan Environment Working Group, to inform the discussions of the Community Plan Steering Group. It makes the case that ecology and biodiversity, and the opportunity to support a 'net gain' in its composition and richness, should be considered a fundamental issue in the drafting of the Plan to support and actively encourage a biodiverse parish.

1.1.2 This report aims to:

- Set the scene by reviewing the risks to ecology and biodiversity loss in the context of international, national, district and local policy.
- Present an evidence base that describes the current status of biodiversity within the Steyning Parish boundary.
- Outline Steyning's vision for the future of biodiversity and the integration of ecological values in the Parish.
- Make practical recommendations on measures and policies that the Plan could incorporate to deliver on this vision.

2 Setting the Context

2.1 The importance of ecological diversity

2.1.1 Steyning's neighbourhood plan (known as the Steyning Community Plan and hereafter referred to as the 'Plan') is being prepared at a crucial point in time. Recent international, national and regional commitments to take positive action toward tackling the global biodiversity crisis are starting to come into effect and actions are being taken by governing bodies to *'become the first generation to leave (that) environment in a better state than we found it*' (extract from Foreword by Theresa May, Prime Minister to the UK Government (UK Govt) 25 Year Environment Plan published 11 January 2018)[1].

2.1.2 The threat of global biodiversity loss is not a new phenomenon and the public are becoming increasingly aware of the issue. In a Union for Ethical Trade (UEBT) 2014 survey[2], 78 per cent of respondents agreed that they *'worry about the changes to the countryside in the UK and loss of native animals and plants'*, and 79 per cent agreed that they *'worry about the loss of species of animals and plants in the world'*. People aged 45–54 were most likely to agree with these statements (UEBT, 2014). Additionally, 84 per cent felt it was essential or important for them to personally contribute to conserving biodiversity (ibid).

2.1.3 The clear consensus from scientists is that the human population need to take urgent and decisive action to stop widespread biodiversity loss as the services provided by natural systems are of great value to the planet.

2.1.4 The research article "Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet" published in *Science* 13 February 2015[3] highlights that 4 of the 9 Planetary Boundaries for our Earth systems have already been crossed and this poses a threat to how humanity can operate safely. The boundary relating to change in biosphere integrity (covering biodiversity loss and species extinction) is one of the 4 either in or beyond the zone of uncertainty and at increased risk for humanity.

2.1.5 At a local level, Steyning is not immune to the global challenge of increasing threats to biodiversity and it is equally as important that local actions are taken. As stated in the UK Govt DEFRA publication "Biodiversity2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystems"[4] the Secretary of State concludes *"We must ensure that the value of nature's services is better understood and enhance people's personal connection with wildlife and nature. Ultimately, conservation efforts can only truly succeed with society's support.".*

2.2 Global and International challenges

2.2.1 The Plan's timeframe (till 2031) goes beyond the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development deadline set by the United Nations (UN) in 2015[5], whereby 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were agreed between the 193 UN countries. Two of these goals specifically relate to ecology and biodiversity (SDG 13: Life on Land and SDG 14: Life below water).

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-launches-25-year-environment-plan

[2] https://www.cbd.int/cepa/doc/uebt-barometer-2014.pdf

[3] https://science.sciencemag.org/content/347/6223/1259855.full

[4] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69446/pb13583-biodiversity-strategy-2020-111111.pdf

[5] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/

Steyning has the opportunity to use the Plan to galvanise action at a local level and help shape a sustainable future that ensures biodiversity is considered in all future planning decisions. Indeed target 15.9 in the Life on Land Goal states:

15.9 *By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts.*

2.2.2 In May 2019 the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Report[6] contained 4 Key Messages as the basis for Governments, Institutions and Policymakers to build goals and strategies for biodiversity and ecosystems services based on a comprehensive assessment of trends in nature over hundreds of years, see Table 1. According to its Chair, Sir Robert Watson, "*The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide.*"

[6] https://www.ipbes.net/system/tdf/ipbes_7_10_add-1-_advance_0.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=35245

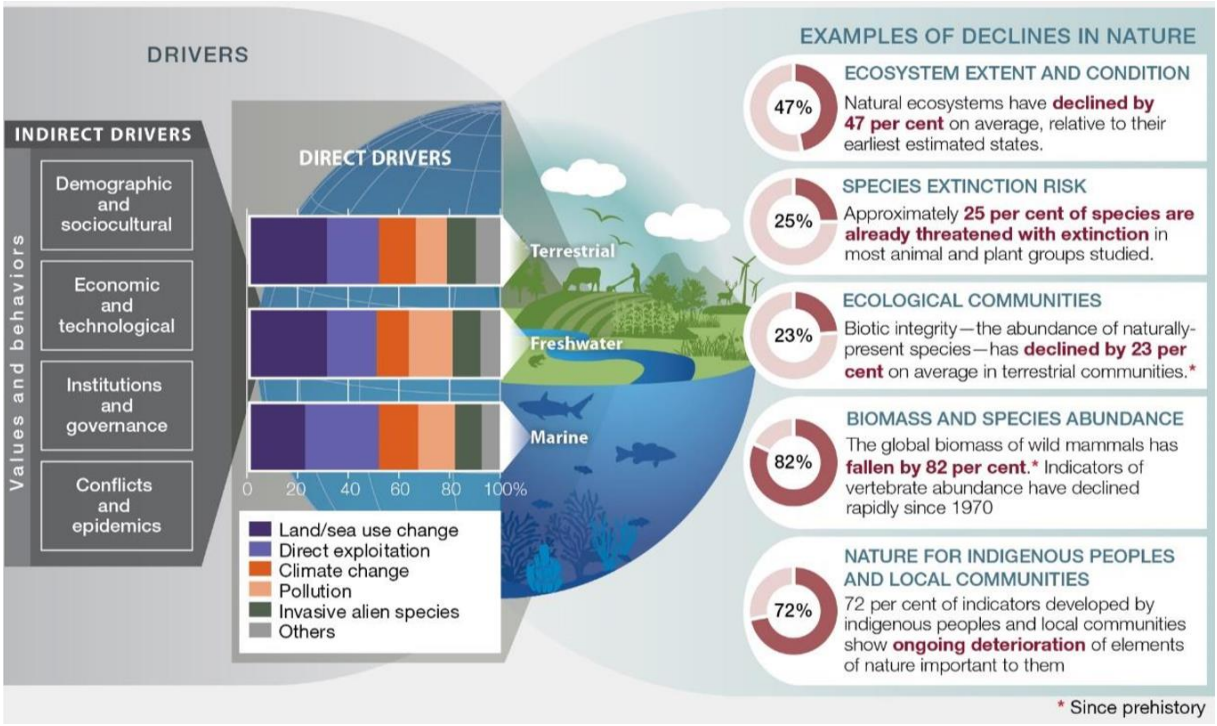
Table 1: IPBES 4 Key messages

A. Nature and its vital contributions to people, which together embody biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are deteriorating worldwide.
B. Direct and indirect drivers of change have accelerated during the past 50 years.
C. Goals for conserving and sustainably using nature and achieving sustainability cannot be met by current trajectories, and goals for 2030 and beyond may only be achieved through transformational* changes across economic, social, political and technological factors.
D. Nature can be conserved, restored and used sustainably while other global societal goals are simultaneously met through urgent and concerted efforts fostering transformational change.

*A fundamental, system-wide reorganisation across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values.

2.2.3 The Key Messages A and B of the IBPES Report[6] (pages 11-20) highlight the global declines in nature, emphasising declines in biodiversity that are being caused by direct and indirect drivers of change. The direct drivers result from an array of underlying societal causes, such as demographic (e.g. human population dynamics), sociocultural (e.g. consumption patterns), economic (e.g. trade), technological, or relating to institutions, governance, conflicts and epidemics. Figure 1 is from page 13 of the report and highlights in particular that nearly half of natural Ecosystems have declined from their earliest estimates, and a quarter of species are already threatened with extinction.

Figure 1: IPBES drivers of change to global biodiversity and ecosystem services



2.2.4 Tackling the global threat to biodiversity will require a radical transformation in how we treat and manage nature and our natural environments, how we protect and make best use the planet's resources and what actions we take to reduce the intensity of drivers of biodiversity loss as described in Figure 1.

2.3 UK Government approach

2.3.1 The UK Government recognised the need to act urgently and decisively to improve our environment and published its 25 Year plan in 2018[7] (DEFRA A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment 11th January 2018). The plan contains a variety of targets and methods by which it wishes to improve the environment, within a generation. A framework of indicators has been developed to monitor and measure the changes required (DEFRA May 2019). Figure 2 shows the summary.

Figure 2: DEFRA's framework for monitoring and measuring improvements to the environment

2.3.2 The Goals relating to Clean and Plentiful Water and Thriving plants and wildlife demonstrate how biodiversity is embedded in the 25 Year Plan, together with the overall target of a net gain in biodiversity in any future new developments in England after the forthcoming Environment Bill (per Chancellor's Spring Statement 2019[8]).

2.3.3 Annex 2 of the Environment Bill outlines a variety of strategy documents and plans for some of the work required. Whilst many of these have some relevance to the challenge of creating a net gain for biodiversity, the section dedicated to the outcome entitled "Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes" makes specific reference to targeted strategies. These include:

- Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services (UK Govt policy paper published 19 August 2011).

[7] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf

[8] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/spring-statement-2019-what-you-need-to-know

- National pollinator strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England (UK Govt policy paper published 4 November 2014).
- Plant biosecurity strategy for Great Britain (UK Govt policy paper published 30 April 2014).
- Tree health resilience strategy (UK Govt policy paper published 25 May 2018).
- Aquatic animal health strategy for England (UK Govt policy paper published 4 December 2015).

2.3.4 Defra's latest iteration to the Environment Bill has been tightened considerably following consultation, now confirming a requirement for new developments to deliver a 10% net gain in biodiversity.

2.3.5 In developing potential policies and measures for the Plan there will need to be clear alignment of and continuity with the aims and objectives of each of these strategies.

2.4 Horsham District Council commitment

2.4.1 As part of the UK Govt 25 Year Plan referred to in paragraph 2.3.1, Local authorities were asked a series of questions by DEFRA regarding the prospect of mandating biodiversity net gain. Horsham District Council (HDC) responded on 8 February 2019. The primary question and HDC response are as follows:

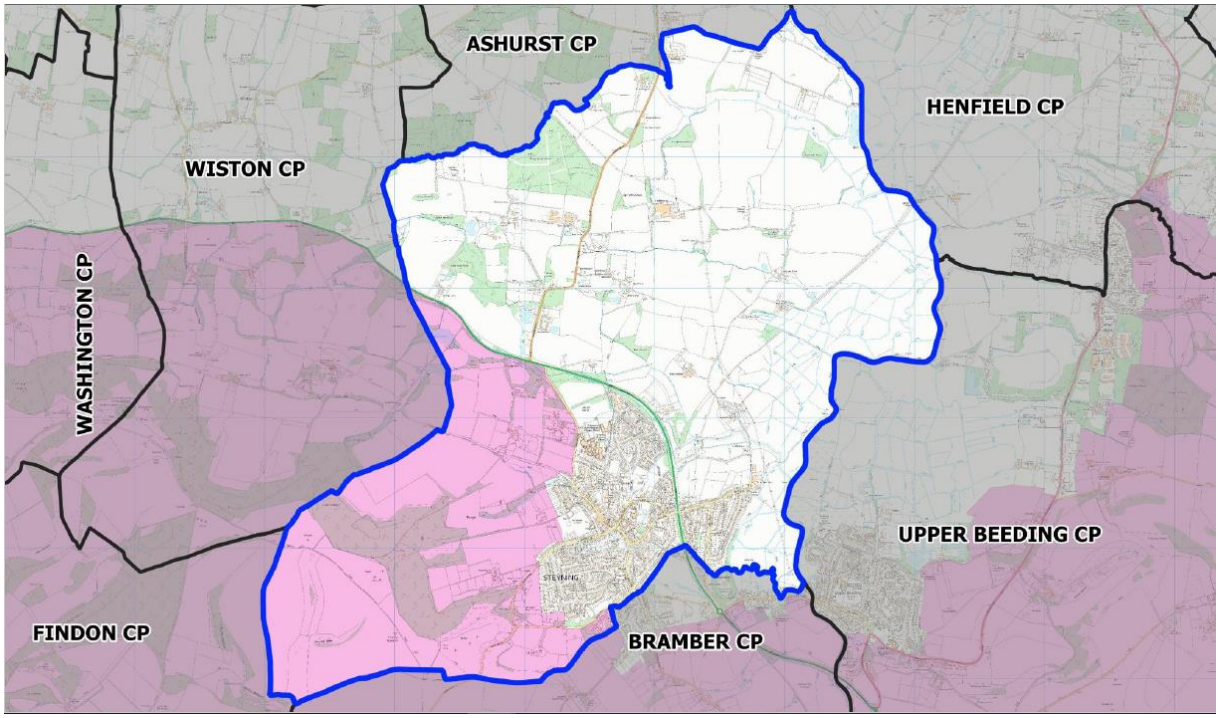
Q. Should biodiversity net gain be mandated for all housing, commercial and other development within the scope of the Town and Country Planning Act?

A. Yes. This would be particularly positive to Horsham District, a highly rural district with limited constraints and with high development pressure. A biodiversity net gain policy would provide some certainty that the quality of forthcoming development values biodiversity and intrinsic qualities of the landscape therefore maintaining what makes our district so special. The policy would also need to address the risk that the design of spaces for recreation or other uses become side-tracked in favour of delivering landscape biodiversity targets. Net gain will need to be delivered in conjunction with the other aims of place making.

2.4.2 HDC recognises the importance of and need for a clear commitment to biodiversity and in particular the rural aspects and places within the district, including Steyning Parish.

2.4.3 It should also be noted that the south west section of Steyning Parish, covering approximately 25% of the entire Parish area, is designated within the South Downs National Park (SDNP). See the pink shading in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Steyning Parish boundary and South Downs National Park (SDNP) boundary



2.4.4 The SDNP has already developed its own Local Plan under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The South Downs Local Plan[9] was adopted by the SDNP Authority on 2 July 2019. Section 5B of that report (pages 58-67) covers the SDNP policies relating specifically to biodiversity (Strategic Policy SD9: Biodiversity and Geodiversity, SD10: International Sites, and SD11: Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows).

2.4.5 The Plan States in paragraphs 5.73 and 5.74 on page 60: *The purpose of Policy SD9 is to set out a positive strategy to ensure the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and geodiversity across the National Park. It also sets out the hierarchy of designated sites. The aim is to achieve a "net gain" in biodiversity by encouraging all opportunities to enable conservation and enhancement as part of development proposals, planning at landscape-scale and taking opportunities to improve connections between habitats and designated sites.*

2.5 Local awareness and engagement

2.5.1 The local environment is highly prized by Steyning residents, and is one the prime reasons people choose to live here. This was evident from the survey carried out in 2015 as part of the SWAB process. In response to a question asking ***"How important do you think it is that the Neighbourhood Plan should aim to protect the following aspects of the community?"*** these aspects were rated as 'Very Important' by more than two thirds of respondents, see Table 2.

[9] https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/SD_LocalPlan_2019_17Wb.pdf

Table 2: Steyning residents response rate to 2015 SWAB survey asking *How important do you think it is that the Neighbourhood Plan should aim to protect the following aspects of the community?*

Aspect	% of respondents regarding this aspect as 'Very Important'
Views to and from the Downs	82.9%
Green and open spaces	74.4%
Network of footpaths	72.9%
Rural Aspect	68.8%
Flora and Fauna	68.1%

2.5.2 Concern about the environment, wildlife, and climate change is widespread among Steyning residents, as evidenced in Table 2 and by the high level of support for local initiatives and societies with an environmental focus. Most notably:

- The Steyning Downland Scheme has 960 on its mailing list and over 200 active volunteers who regularly engage in projects working on the South Downs area within Steyning parish. The Scheme's Vision is "*to create a place where all life flourishes; an inspiring flagship of local endeavour, rich in wildlife; a natural community space which is enjoyed, valued and skilfully managed by local people, from all generations and backgrounds. We conserve the land and its wildlife, develop the local community and improve quality of life, including people's spiritual development. Our values are derived from the Christian faith and underpin all we do".*
- The Steyning 10:10 Climate Action Group, which runs the local Greening Campaign, has over 550 on its mailing list.
- There are around 270 Friends of Steyning Community Orchard.
- Steyning Horticultural Society has more than 300 members.
- Steyning has two very well used allotments with around 120 plot holders in total.

2.5.3 There are overlaps between these groups and some members and supporters come from outside the Parish. However, given an overall population of 5990 at the last census, these numbers demonstrate the breadth and depth of interest for environmental issues in Steyning, and the presence of an unusually active and enthusiastic support base for green initiatives.

2.5.4 Given this level of interest and concern about the environment, wildlife and ecosystems, many Steyning residents will be expecting a Plan that is both fully aware of these issues and proactive in suggesting measures to enhance the long-term sustainability of Steyning and its surroundings.

2.6 Planning framework

2.6.1 The Plan needs to be set within the context of national and district planning policy (NPPF[10], South Downs Local Plan[9] and Horsham District Council Local Plan[11]). National Policy has been set out in the DEFRA 25 Year Plan mentioned in paragraph 2.3.1 above. Page 33 states:

[10] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf

[11] https://www.horsham.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/28563/Horsham-District-Planning-Framework-2015.pdf

- Current policy is that the planning system should provide biodiversity net gains where possible. We will explore strengthening this requirement for planning authorities to ensure environmental net gains across their areas and will consult* on making this mandatory – including any exemptions that may be necessary. This will enable those authorities to develop locally-led strategies to enhance the natural environment, creating greater certainty and consistency and avoiding increased burden on developers, including those pursuing small-scale developments. We would expect this should have a net positive impact on overall development.
- Some local authorities, major private developers and infrastructure companies have already implemented a net gain approach. Our immediate ambition is to work in partnership with Government bodies, local planning authorities and developers to mainstream the use of existing biodiversity net gain approaches within the planning system, update the tools that underpin them and reduce process costs to developers. We have already implemented an innovative, strategic approach to great crested newt licensing in the planning and development process and will look to build on and further streamline protected species licensing.
- In future, we want to expand the net gain approaches used for biodiversity to include wider natural capital benefits, such as flood protection, recreation and improved water and air quality. Those approaches will sit alongside existing regulations that protect our most threatened or valuable habitats or species. They will enable local planning authorities to target environmental enhancements that are needed most in their areas and give flexibility to developers in providing them.

*This consultation was completed during 2018/19 and The Chancellor's Spring Statement 2019 confirmed the Government will mandate net gain for biodiversity on new developments in England via forthcoming Environment Bill.

2.6.2 Having passed a climate emergency motion on June 26th 2019, Horsham District Council has pledged to tighten up its guidance on climate change and biodiversity. A press release on the 1 July 2019 stated: 'The Council is now producing its updated Local Plan which will look at future housing throughout the District. In doing so we need to see what additional measures we can expect developers to undertake to help the environment and include in our new homes and see how we can increase biodiversity on new housing developments.'

3 Baseline

3.1.1 Publicly available ecological data on Steyning is managed by the Sussex Wildlife Trust, Woods Mill, Henfield and is provided by the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre. The available information comprises biological recordings from the Sussex community, which provides a clear indication of what biological recording has taken place.

3.1.2 The information provided by the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre is a useful tool for making an assessment of the site but should be used in conjunction with site visits and appropriate surveys before further judgements on the presence or absence of key species or habitats can be made.

3.1.3 For the purposes of this report a data search was completed on 5 June 2019 (reference SxBRC/19/155) to obtain existing data on Steyning's biodiversity. Due to the scale of the review, no additional field surveys were undertaken.

3.1.4 Based on the data currently held by the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre, the following statutory and non-statutory sites and habitat designations were identified:

Statutory

- **National Park** – South Downs National Park (see area map above in Figure 3)

Non-Statutory

- **Local Wildlife Site (LWS)** – Wiston Pond, River Adur Water Meadows & Wyckham Wood and Steyning Coombe and Steyning Round Hill.
- **Local Geological Site (LGS)** – Steyning Bowl and Steyning Round Hill.
- **Designated Road Verge** – A283 Washington Road, Borstal Road Steyning, Ingrams Road and Penlands Rise Steyning.
- **Section 41 habitats** – 8 locations identified.

3.1.5 The **Local Wildlife Sites** description are as follows:

Wiston Pond

3.1.6 This is a relatively large area of open water. There are extensive beds of Lesser Reedmace with some Common Reedmace and occasional Bulrush and Branched Bur-reed. On the field edge of the Reedmace beds, there are additional species such as Water Mint, Meadowsweet, Common Fleabane, Yellow Iris and Wild Angelica. The pond is surrounded on three sides by trees and scrub including Alder, Willow, Hazel and Hawthorn and some Oak, Ash and Poplar. The islands are covered in trees, mostly Alder. This site is particularly important for amphibians. It supports exceptional populations of Common Toad, good populations of Common Frog, and Smooth Newt is also present. Breeding toads migrate across the A283 road to the north of the pond, and so a toad-tunnel has been constructed to aid their safe passage. It is also a significant site for birds, Little Grebe and Mute Swans breed here, and other species such as Tufted Duck and Water Rail have been recorded using the pond.

River Adur Water Meadows & Wyckham Wood

3.1.7 Wyckham Wood is a small, ancient semi-natural woodland situated 300 metres west of the River Adur. It is fairly open deciduous woodland of mature Ash and Oak. Bluebell and Bramble dominate the ground flora. About 19 pairs of Herons nest here annually. The network of ditches includes some that are of outstanding botanical importance. The rare Water-violet occurs here. In West Sussex this plant is virtually confined to the Adur Valley. Other uncommon plants found in these ditches includes Fine-leaved Water-dropwort, Tubular Water-dropwort, Arrowhead, Marsh Pennywort, Marsh Stitchwort, Pink Water-speedwell, Common Club-rush and Sea Club-rush. Small numbers of Reed Warblers breed in the reed-fringed ditches. North of the disused railway line near Wyckham Dale Farm, there is an interesting area comprising tall herb fen, scattered scrub, ditches and a pond. This small area supports a range of breeding birds, including Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Willow Warbler, Whitethroat, Reed Bunting and Yellowhammer.

Steyning Coombe and Steyning Round Hill

3.1.8 Steyning Coombe and Steyning Round Hill are both important areas of unimproved downland on the escarpment above Steyning. Together these areas are extremely diverse, having steep slopes facing all directions, both short herb-rich sward and tall ungrazed sward, open grassland and grassland with scattered scrub. The rich flora and invertebrate fauna include several rare plants, snails and butterflies.

3.1.9 Steyning Coombe is a small east-facing coombe, once used as a rifle range. There are some fairly extensive areas of species-rich grassland, particularly on the west and south sides of the coombe. Notable downland herbs include Small Scabious, Devil's-bit Scabious and Autumn Gentian. The two woodland clearings above the coombe contain several interesting plants such as Vervain, Common Gromwell and Dropwort. Steyning Coombe is of great importance for its snail fauna. Two rare grassland species, *Monacha cartusiana* and *Helicella itala*, occur in abundance on the south-facing slopes.

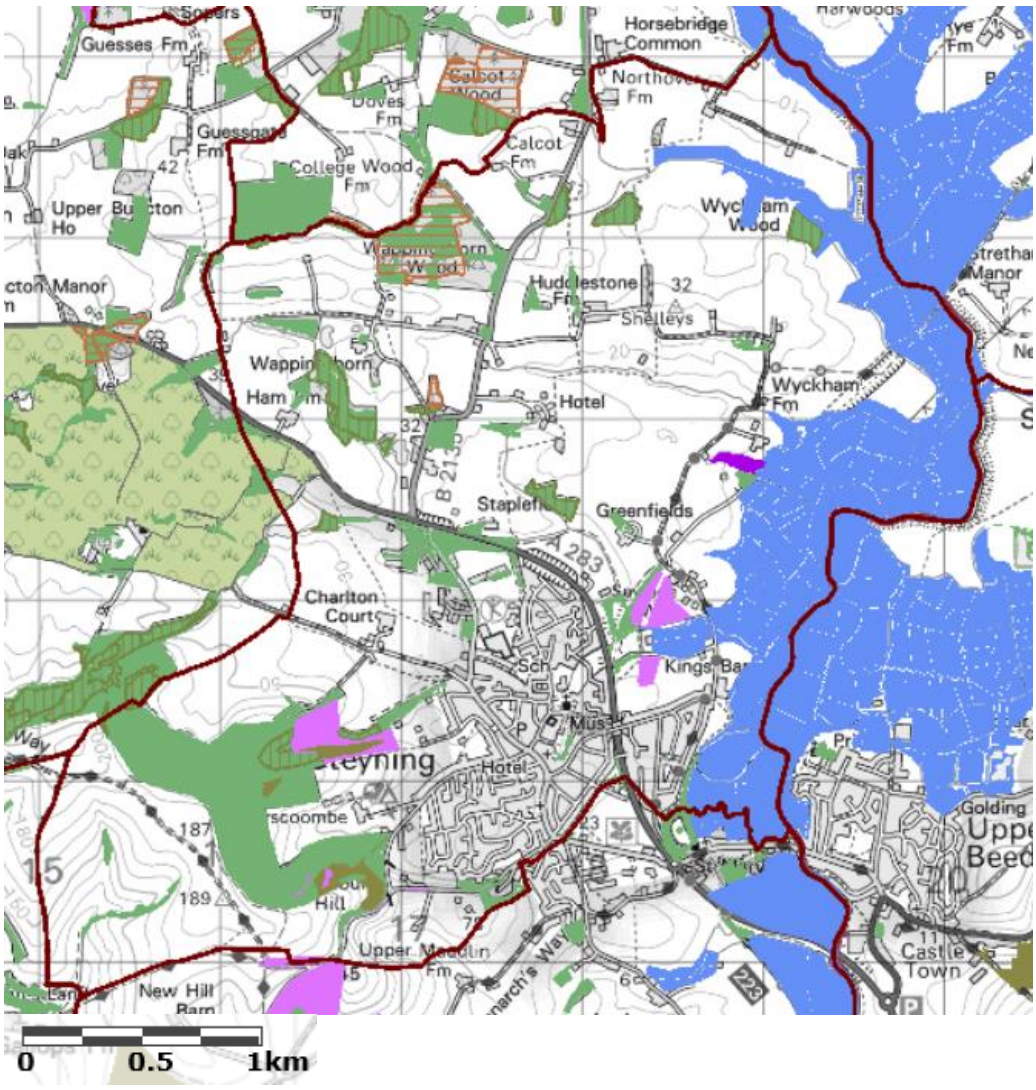
3.1.10 Steyning Round Hill is mostly species-poor grassland dominated by Tor-grass. However, there are areas of herb-rich sward with Horseshoe Vetch, Autumn Lady's-tresses, Common Valerian, Wild Thyme and Autumn Gentian.

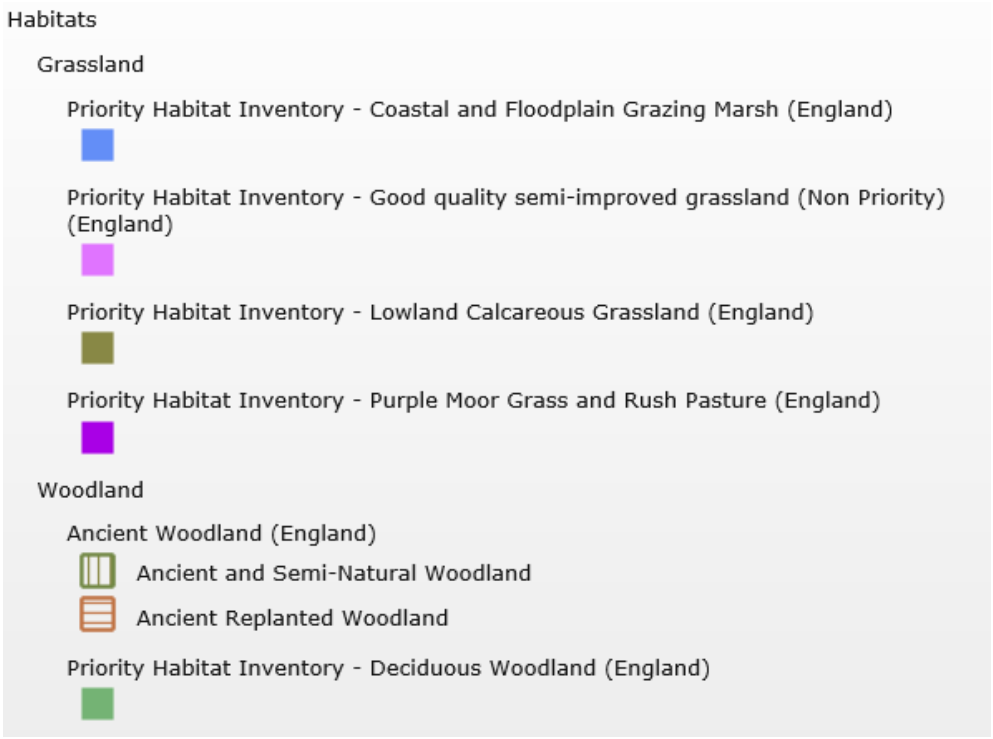
3.1.11 Bostal Chalkpit, adjacent to the lane on the south side of Steyning Round Hill, is an extremely important site. The steep banks of short herb-rich sward support Autumn Lady's-tresses, Dropwort, Common Gromwell, Yellow-wort, Early-purple Orchid and Pyramidal Orchid. The rare Early Gentian was recently re-discovered in Bostal Chalkpit, its only West Sussex locality. A rare moss, *Weissia tortilis*, two rare lichens, *Gyalecta jenensis* and *Petractis clausa*, and a localised species of snail, *Lauria cylindracea* have also been recorded. The roadside embankment to the south-west of Bostal Chalkpit is of botanical interest, particularly for the presence of at least thirty Junipers. At least twenty- seven species of butterfly have been recorded on Steyning Round Hill, including Small, Adonis and Chalkhill Blue, Brown Argus, Green Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper, Ringlet and Marbled White.

3.2 Habitats

3.2.1 Priority habitats evident in the Parish are shown in Figure 4. These include: coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, good quality semi-improved grassland, lowland calcareous grassland, purple moor grass and rush pasture, ancient and semi-natural woodland, ancient replanted woodland and deciduous woodland.

Figure 4: Priority habitats within the Steyning Parish boundary





3.3 Species

3.3.1 The report identified the following summary of species within the Parish boundary:

- International designations – 51 species and 1,701 records
- National designations – 188 species and 9,080 records
- Other designations – 355 species and 13,978 records
- A total of 386 species with 15,369 records.

3.3.2 Some species have special protection under international and national legislation (such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017). Legally protected species, which could be affected by new developments, include but are not restricted to all wild birds, all native species of bat, great crested newt and badger, water vole, brown trout, river lamprey and European eel.

3.3.3 The report provides the following data relevant to such species:

- Great Crested Newt – 3 records (latest 21/2/17) with maximum abundance of 10.
- European eel – 22 records (latest 3/9/12) with maximum abundance of 211.
- Brown/sea trout – 23 records (latest 3/9/12) with maximum abundance of 102.
- Water Vole – 1 record from 1997 with maximum abundance of 1.
- Grass snake – 25 records (latest 7/6/17) with maximum abundance of10.
- Adder – 24 records (latest 5/3/15) with maximum abundance of 7.
- Osprey – 12 records (Latest 16/4/17) with maximum abundance of 2.
- Hen harrier – 63 records (latest 20/1/19) with maximum abundance of 4.
- Peregrine – 142 records (latest 26/12/17) with maximum abundance of 3.
- Skylark – 381 records (latest 22/12/17) with maximum abundance of 500.

- Black Redstart – 38 records (latest 9/4/15) with maximum abundance of 3.

3.3.4 As can be seen from the above report extracts, Steyning and the surrounding countryside has a significant density of species, communities, habitats and ecosystems, making up a rich biodiverse landscape. Trees, woodland and hedgerows are distinctive features of the Parish. Non-woodland trees, including those in hedgerows and street trees, make an important contribution to landscape character, the historic environment and ecosystem services.

4 Increasing biodiversity in Steyning

4.1.1 As described in Section 3 above, Steyning enjoys a rich environment full of wildlife and important species of flora and fauna. However, such habitats are subject to a range of pressures, including those from development, and are often degraded and fragmented. Despite potential negative impacts, development can have positive impacts on biodiversity and geological features. Examples of positive impacts to biodiversity from development include: positive management of geomorphological features (e.g. managing soils and catchments to reduce sedimentation), restoring interconnected networks of wildlife sites and achieving net gains in biodiversity by protecting and enhancing existing natural habitats. Additionally, commercial and residential development can integrate gardens, parks and buildings to act as "stepping stones" and "wildlife corridors" that facilitate the natural migration of wildlife from one place to another. If development is planned with these in mind, it can conserve and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity.

4.1.2 Guidance on understanding the key issues and setting policy to protect and enhance the natural environment has recently been updated by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). (issued 21 July 2019[12])

4.1.3 Paragraph: 021 Reference ID: 8-021-20190721 of the guidance states: How can plans encourage (biodiversity) net gain?

- *Plans, and particularly those containing strategic policies, can be used to set out a suitable approach to both biodiversity and wider environmental net gain, how it will be achieved, and which areas present the best opportunities to deliver gains. Such areas could include those identified in: natural capital plans; local biodiversity opportunity or ecological network maps; local green infrastructure strategies; strategic flood risk assessments; water cycle studies; air quality management plans; river basin management plans; and strategic protected species licensing areas. Consideration may also be given to local sites including where communities could benefit from improved access to nature.*

4.1.4 The guidance goes on to offer a selection of ideas on how a net gain might be achieved, and these, amongst others, will be considered as potential policies and measures outlined in Section 5 of this Report. Paragraph 023 Reference ID: 8-023-20190721 states:

- *Planning conditions or obligations can, in appropriate circumstances, be used to require that a planning permission provides for works that will measurably increase biodiversity. An applicant may also propose measures to achieve biodiversity net gain through a unilateral undertaking. The work involved may, for example, involve creating new habitats, enhancing existing habitats, providing green roofs, green walls, street trees or sustainable drainage systems. Relatively small features can often achieve important benefits for wildlife, such as incorporating 'swift bricks' and bat boxes in developments and providing safe routes for hedgehogs between different areas of habitat.*
- *Benefits could be achieved entirely on-site or by using off-site gains where necessary. Off-site measures can sometimes be secured from 'habitat banks', which comprise areas of enhanced or created habitats which generate biodiversity unit 'credits'.*

[12] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment

- *Care needs to be taken to ensure that any benefits promised will lead to genuine and demonstrable gains for biodiversity. Discussions with local wildlife organisations can help to identify appropriate solutions, and tools such as the Defra biodiversity metric[13] can be used to assess whether a biodiversity net gain outcome is expected to be achieved. Planning authorities need to make sure that any evidence and rationale supplied by applicants are supported by the appropriate scientific expertise and local wildlife knowledge.*
- *When assessing opportunities and proposals to secure biodiversity net gain, the local planning authority will need to have regard to all relevant policies, especially those on open space, health, green infrastructure, Green Belt and landscape. It will also be important to consider whether provisions for biodiversity net gain will be resilient to future pressures from further development or climate change, and supported by appropriate maintenance arrangements.*

4.1.5 Having considered the extent to which biodiversity has become such an important issue to our planet, recognised by scientific experts and at all levels of international, national, regional and local Government, it is felt imperative that this aspect is covered in the Plan and that ***policies and measures be designed to increase the local level of biodiversity to ensure a 'net gain'*** for the benefit of all within the Parish.

[13] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/biodiversity-offsetting

5 Recommended policies and measures

5.1.1 The Plan seeks to ensure the protection and enhancement of the Parish's ecological assets and achieve measurable gains in biodiversity over the Plan period and beyond.

5.1.2 It is suggested that the Steering Group consider including the recommended policies below which respond to the issues identified in this report:

Protect and enhance biodiversity

5.1.3 For the Plan to align with international, national and regional commitments, and achieve biodiversity net gain, planning policy is required at a local level to support no net loss biodiversity as a minimum. The following policy is recommended to ensure the protection and enhancement of existing biodiversity to assist in achieving biodiversity net gain for Steyning.

Recommended Policy 1 - Protect and Enhance Biodiversity

Development proposals, which aim to protect and enhance biodiversity, will be supported. In protecting and enhancing biodiversity proposals should:

- Protect designated sites, protected species and ancient or species-rich hedgerows, grasslands and woodlands;
- Preserve ecological networks, and the migration and transition of flora and fauna;
- Protect aged or veteran trees;
- Preserve, restore and enhance existing wildlife habitats/species, particularly those that are important to Steyning's biodiversity, these include but are not limited to:
  - Deciduous woodland
  - Ancient woodland
  - Reedbed
  - Lowland calcareous grassland
  - Brown Hairstreak (*Thecla betulae*)
  - Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon*)
  - Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*)
  - Early Gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)

Green infrastructure

5.1.4 Green infrastructure is a strategically planned and delivered network of high quality green spaces and environmental features that can be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering ecological services required by communities[14]. Developments that align with green infrastructure principles can help to connect habitats and species, which will improve the ecological conditions for wildlife and potentially increase biodiversity. The fragmented nature of priority habitats within the Steyning Parish boundary, see Figure 4, demonstrates that the provision of green infrastructure would assist in increasing biodiversity and improving ecological conditions for local wildlife. The following policy is recommended to enhance the green infrastructure in the Steyning Parish boundary.

Recommended Policy 2 – Green Infrastructure

[14] www.publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/94026

Development proposals will be supported, where they protect and, wherever possible, enhance the green infrastructure and valued landscape features of the Parish. These include;

- All sites listed in the Ecological Data Search SxBRC/19/155 – Summary report dated 05/06/19
- Public Rights of Way and their settings;
- Hedgerows;
- Copses and woods, including ancient woodlands and orchards;
- River corridors.
- All Local Green Spaces (as defined).

Sustainable design

5.1.5 For Steyning's natural environment to remain sustainable for future generations and continue providing ecosystem services, all new development must be designed and maintained with consideration for ecological systems and processes. The following policy is recommended to ensure that all new development will incorporate wildlife interests into design to safeguard biodiversity for Steyning's future generations.

Recommended Policy 3 - Sustainable Design

All new development must ensure the green infrastructure assets of the Parish are protected and maintained, and wherever possible, enhanced. Development proposals will be supported, provided their layout and landscape schemes have regard to the following principles as appropriate:

- Existing hedgerows, trees, woodlands, banks, ponds, watercourses and other important landscape and natural features must be retained to encourage wildlife and for visual reasons; any hedgerow replacement must be with a variety indigenous species, e.g. avoiding the use of coniferous plants;
- Development proposals should demonstrate that appropriate consideration has been given to providing for wildlife and that sustainable proposals to protect and improve wildlife interests have been incorporated into the design;
- Non-Tree Preservation Order trees and those outside the Conservation Areas are all important to the setting of the parish and to wildlife and so regard must be had to their retention or replacement with a variety of indigenous species to retain that setting;
- Schemes must retain existing green corridors, ponds and other important wildlife habitats and the opportunity for a landscape scheme to provide a new green corridor to achieve ecological connectivity between open countryside and an existing wildlife habitat in a developed area, should be realised;
- Landscape schemes should provide for the effective screening of new developments, including providing for their ongoing maintenance;
- Landscape design proposals should seek to create multifunctional networks of spaces and features which connect with surrounding and existing biodiversity corridors;
- Sustainable urban drainage measures should be integrated within the landscape design as part of a multifunctional layout. Where possible this should incorporate appropriate surface water features that provide habitats.

6 Conclusions

6.1.1 According to the official tourist website for South East England[15].

"Historic Steyning, nestling against the inspiring landscape of the South Downs, is well known as one of the most picturesque towns in Sussex.

Rightfully known as a great destination for walkers, Steyning provides easy access to beautiful countryside, the South Downs Way and to other long-distance paths. There are also excellent local routes to the mysterious Chanctonbury Ring, the Iron Age hill fort at Cissbury Ring, and delightfully gentle walks through the Adur Valley."

6.1.2 This description owes much to the natural environment, wildlife habitats, species, communities and ecosystems that are currently contained within and surround Steyning.

6.1.3 As one of the key points contained in the Plan Vision Statement, in 2031 our Parish will *"Treasure its heritage, having enhanced it where possible so that the Parish continues to be an attractive place to live, learn, work and visit."*

6.1.4 The Plan, and the recommended policies and measures contained here, are specifically designed to retain and enhance Steyning's environment for the current and future generations to enjoy and deliver on that Vision.

[15] https://www.visitsoutheastengland.com