

Meeting of the Environment & Leisure Committee

Monday 1 September 2025

Agenda Item 10.2

Link roles Weald to Waves and Biodiversity (Cllr French & Cllr Reed)

- A. As we continue our investigations it should be noted that the town's boundary and urbanisation has already impacted all our natural resources and reserves —watercourses, wetlands, ancient woodlands, meadows, species of principal importance, priority habitats and habitats of principal importance^{1 2} - The volume of combined sewage outfalls releases, visitor impacts through footfall and dogs and other direct and indirect disturbance is leading to the degradation of our natural resources.
- B. Targeted ecological surveys, community feedback, and emerging data on hydrology, invasive species, natural environment, visitor disturbance off public rights of way, and declining wildlife populations across the landscape, rivers and water habitats, are informing our rangers biodiversity work to protect, safeguard and restore Uckfield's green-blue infrastructure.
- C. The current Uckfield Woodland Management Plans are now out of date with our emerging evidence and species knowledge/surveys are underway to update these Woodland Management Plans as soon as possible but will take time to update them³.
- D. Our natural habitats and reserves safeguard an array of important biodiversity needing targeted action plans, including endangered habitats and endangered species of importance to Uckfield, south of Ashdown Forest, Buxted Park SSSI and the emerging Sussex nature partnership and strategic local nature recovery strategies by the ESCC Designated Authority.
- E. Our Ranger is working hard to look after these habitats and update these plans with the mutual support and joint review of the woodland specialists and joint custodians of irreplaceable habitats through the Forestry Commission. This work is yielding urgent new insights into the needs of our reserves, priority habitats, priority species, irreplaceable woodlands, riparian habitats, ghyll habitats, woodlands, bogs, meadows, freshwater habitats, and other ecological corridors supporting our woodland corridors⁴.

¹ Indirect and direct impact to ancient woodlands identified in this policy framework <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-ancient-trees-and-veteran-trees-advice-for-making-planning-decisions> ² List of habitats and species of UK principal importance (for Uckfield Biodiversity Action Plan) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england>

³ Woodland Management Plan

<https://www.uckfieldtc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Uckfield-Town-Council-Woodland-Mgt-Plan-2021-combined.pdf>

⁴ [Uckfield Town Council Woodland Management Plan](#) (2016)

⁵ 30by30

<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/restoring-30-of-englands-land-and-sea-by-2030-house-of-lords-environment-and-climate-change-committee-report/>

⁶ Why Geodiversity is important <https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/news/why-geodiversity-in-sussex-is-so-important> , [Sussex Geology Partnership](#), LGS site West Park Nature Reserve [Rocks Park Local Geological Site Sussex RIGS Ref. TQ42/02](#) links to [Woodland Trust](#) [Lake Wood](#) [Rocks site](#) [reference](#) [LGS](#) [TQ42/35](#)

West Park Local Nature Reserve is a designated geodiversity site known as a Local Geological Site for earth science ⁶ species and habitats which are linked with the Woodland Trust Lake Wood Local Wildlife Site which is also a Local Geological Site. Both West Park and Lake Wood are **designed historic picturesque landscapes and natural parkland with geodiversity** of the Streatfeilds' historic estate, once known as "The Rocks", now known as Buckswood Grange GII listed ⁷. We will need a further review of the historic landscape within our woodlands as landscape archaeological heritage assessments have brought forward previously unknown important habitats with the species assessments.

- F. We understand that securing specialist assistance, equipment, training, and volunteer coordination to implement survey findings and advance habitat and species restoration relies on budgets and ongoing support as new knowledge and evidence leads to updating our solutions as part of the environment and leisure services for the town.

Recommendations to E&L Committee, for consideration in the autumn budget setting process:

1. To acknowledge the **Forestry Commission's** ongoing reviews of woodland-based reserves including the impacts of visitor pressures, development, geodiversity/biodiversity planning and species protection, and how we may avoid fragmentation, edge effects design, habitat loss and safeguard ecological corridors/buffers/woodland edge effects ⁸
2. To acknowledge the need to **develop Uckfield specific Biodiversity Action Plans** ⁹ which will take time alongside these reviews, with consideration of Green and Blue Infrastructure.^{10 11}
3. To consider, review and prepare budget proposals for 2026–27 onwards, to achieve funding for vital reserve and ecological assistance protecting and restoring our natural assets, and specialist survey work where needed, and to report back on progress as plans evolve. The Committee will also submit suggestions for Full Council consideration regarding applications for S106 funding from Wealden District Council;
4. To acknowledge and thank the **Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust for the updated Shortbridge Stream River and Uckfield Adaptation Project** and express our support for this initiative restoring habitats and freshwater species migratory routes ¹².
5. To note that East Sussex County Council will release the next stage of the **Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy in the Summer of 2025**;
6. To task the Biodiversity & Climate Change Working Group with the review of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy where it may include Uckfield natural assets; and to make recommendations to this Committee on its consultation response;

⁷ Buckswood Grange GII <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1194277>

⁸ Woodland Edge Effects <https://cdn.forestryresearch.gov.uk/1991/03/fcop028.pdf>, Woodland Trust <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/43619/impacts-of-nearby-development-on-the-ecology-of-ancient-woodland-a-ddendum.pdf>, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0169204696003696>, <https://cdn.forestryresearch.gov.uk/2000/04/fcbu123.pdf>, <https://www.conservationevidence.com/actions/3942>, and Forestry Commission Why Woodland Edge Matters <https://forestrycommission.blog.gov.uk/2025/04/16/why-woodland-edge-matters/> (30-40m inside woodland - allow 2 tree lengths fall zone eg Oak Tree 20-40m mature height)

⁹ <https://incc.gov.uk/our-work/uk-bap-priority-habitats/>, Example BAP create for Uckfield landscape [Local Wildlife Site example \(Oxfordshire, Oxfordshire 2025, West Oxfordshire example, SNP to date\)](#).

¹⁰ GBI Infrastructure - <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/Principles/GIPrinciples.aspx>

¹¹ Example about LiDAR images <https://maps.nls.uk/guides/lidar/>

¹² Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust <https://oart.org.uk/projects/uck-adaptation-project> and WFD Shortbridge Stream River connects Uckfield to Ashdown Forest and the River Ouse <https://oart.org.uk/our-work/breaking-barriers>