# Cuckfield Parish

# Biodiversity Action Plan

# 2025-30

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# Introduction

1. **Remit and Scope of the Report**

The recent *State of Nature* (2023)report shows that of the species studied, there has been an average decline of 19% in the UK since monitoring began in 1970 with 43% of birds, 31% of amphibians and reptiles, 28% of fungi and lichen and 26% of terrestrial mammals at risk of being lost.

The UK is commonly reported as one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. Certainly, fragmented landscapes with isolated nature reserves and other protected sites cannot sustain wildlife in the long term. Increasingly, the economic value of biodiversity is being realized where ecosystem services are being recognised as fundamental for our health, well-being, food and fuel.

This BAP plan will principally concentrate on sites owned by the Parish Council but will also take a wider view as to nature conservation throughout the parish. As the plan progresses, it is hoped that other stakeholders or private landowners will emerge to increase the reach of the plan.

In terms of timing, any actions are unlikely to commence until 2025 and with anticipated target dates of 2030 set for the Climate and Nature Bill, it seems not unreasonable to have a similar end date for this BAP.

1. **Legislation**

The Environment Act 2021 is the UK’s framework of environmental protection, intended to fill the gap with the removal of EU law. The legal duty on policy makers came into force on 1 November 2023.

The Act consists of four elements: legally binding [targets](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-legally-binding-environment-targets-set-out) on species abundance, air and water quality, waste, woodland cover and marine protection; an [Environmental Improvement Plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-improvement-plan); an independent body–the [Office for Environmental Protection](https://www.theoep.org.uk/office-environmental-protection) –to hold the government to account on its environmental commitments and a new duty on ministers to build [environmental principles](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-principles-policy-statement/explanatory-memorandum-to-the-environmental-principles-policy-statement) into their policy making.

Under this act, East and West Sussex now have a statutory duty to provide Local Nature Recovery Strategies to provide coordinated action on nature recovery. It is unclear at the moment what progress they have made so far but an officer has been assigned who will be duly contacted as their input could be key. Currently, Mid Sussex does not appear to have any specific policies relating to biodiversity or wildlife recovery and has recently outsourced the management of all its conservation sites to Glendale Countryside Services.

The Climate & Ecological Emergency Bill was reintroduced in March 2024 as The Climate and Nature Bill (CAN Bill) which is currently before the House of Commons. Its aim is to increase the health, abundance, diversity and resilience of species populations, habitats and ecosystems so that by 2030 and measured by a baseline of 2020, nature is visibly and measurably on the path of recovery.

The Secretary of State would have a duty to implement strategies to achieve targets for both carbon emissions and to restore biodiversity.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) makes sure development has a measurably positive impact ('net gain') on biodiversity, compared to what was there before development.

Objectives include:

* Minimum 10% gain required calculated using the Biodiversity Metric & approval of a biodiversity gain plan;
* Habitat secured for at least 30 years via planning obligations or conservation covenants;
* Delivered on-site, off-site or via a new statutory biodiversity credits scheme
* National register for net gain delivery sites.

BNG is now required from April 2024 and implementation for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects planned for 2025. ‘On-site’ includes all land within the boundary of a project i.e. usually means within a red line boundary. ‘Off-site’ is all land outside of the on-site boundary, regardless of ownership.

It is still unclear as to how BNG will ultimately evolve although some developers are clearly looking to provide more than 10% although of course this all depends on what baseline is determined by the Biodiversity metric calculation.

1. **Overall aims & objectives**
2. To conserve, manage and enhance Cuckfield’s natural heritage and wildlife.
3. To establish baseline ecological data for selected sites and habitats to establish current status and presence of any notable species. To devise any actions to enhance conservation accordingly.
4. To provide cconnectivity via wildlife corridors, either independently or working with networks via Local Authorities, Weald to Waves or Wilder Ouse.
5. Engage with the local community, in particular, schools and young people in further and higher education along with those who might come forward as volunteers, particularly as Citizen Scientists.

# The Parish

1. **Size / location**

The parish is approx. 4.00 sq. km in size with main areas of settlement located to the north.

1. **Geology / Soil / Climate**

Cuckfield lies on a mix of sandstones and mudstones which are part of the Hastings Beds from the Lower Cretaceous. The sandstones provide reasonable drainage whereas the mudstones yield clay soils with impeded drainage but overall, soils are characterized as slightly acid loams.

The climate is temperate maritime, with an average of 65mm rain per month (national ave is 110mm) with temperatures averaging between 1 and 22C.

1. **Topography / Landscape**

Cuckfield lies on a prominent east- west sandstone ridge that is the watershed of two river systems – the Ouse to the north and the Adur to the south.

To the north and west lies the High Weald AONB, an area typified by ancient and ghyll woodland while to the south and east is the Low Weald, characterised by small enclosed fields interspersed with woods, ghyll woods and hedges.

1. **Review of historic data**

It would appear from data held at Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre (SBRC) that there were a number of observers recording wildlife in the parish several years ago but certainly since 2015 records have declined sharply. Whether this is due to demographic changes and loss of a generation who were interested in wildlife or a loss of wildlife in general or indeed both, is hard to know.

Species of interest that are not included in this BAP include breeding records for Skylark, Yellowhammer and Barn Owl from Cuckfield Park, Brook Street and Beech Farm (Whiteman’s Green) although the majority of these were from the years around 2008 to 2011. Whether any of these species are still present is unknown.

There are about a dozen records (including some for probable breeding) for Cuckfield’s emblematic bird, the Cuckoo although again most from the 2008-10 period with the last record in 2020 along with four records of Turtle Dove with the last in 2011.

There are generally a handful of records each for amphibians such as Common Frog, Common Toad and all three newts including Palmate and Smooth and likewise for reptiles including Adder, Grass Snake and Common Lizard. Dragonflies such as Downy Emerald and Scarce Chaser have been recorded at Cuckfield Park.

1. **Local Nature reserves, networks, links and connectivity**

Blunts Wood and Paige’s Wood and Meadows LNR’s are on the parish’s eastern boundaries with Bolnore Woods LNR to the south while New England Wood is on the parish’s western boundary.

There have been increasing attempts at joining up wildlife sites and green spaces with two schemes currently in place.

The **Weald to Waves** network is a nature recovery corridor running across Sussex, strengthening biodiversity by improving connectivity but also supporting sustainable local food production and helping rural communities to thrive.

It has three goals – notably to

1. create a nationally significant wildlife corridor of 100 miles in length with over 20,000 hectares of largely contiguous natural habitat so that wildlife can travel through the landscape more easily.
2. promote nature as a provider of vital ecosystem services - clean water, fertile soils, pollination, carbon capture and flood control.
3. create new opportunities for people to understand, enjoy and protect nature along the corridor and to meet socio-economic and environmental objectives so that communities can thrive.

While a map of sites is being created, next steps for W2W in terms of whether it will be able to achieve any gravitas or influence within planning is unclear.

The **Wilder Ouse** project plans to bring people together across the Ouse River Catchment to help restore nature at the heart of its landscapes and livelihoods of the community.

There is clearly potential in using these networks to connect with other landowners within the parish but it should also be possible, utilizing the PC’s own sites such as Horsefield Green and Buttinghill, to initiate a local Cuckfield network which could expand as word of mouth spreads.

**3. Parish Council Sites**

1. **Horsefield Green**

Before the development at Horsefield Green (HG), there was clearly some good meadow land with classic Wealden plants such as Oxeye Daisy and Common Knapweed. The PC took control of the site in late Dec 2017 working to a Landscape Management Plan while the area was officially registered as a Village Green in 2021. Two small orchards were added in 2022/23 with just over twenty fruit trees altogether.

1. **Cemetery**

Already managed on a mosaic basis with some areas cut and some left for wildflowers to prosper including Oxeye Daisy, Common Knapweed and occasional orchids. The site provides valuable habitat for insects particularly butterflies, notably Marbled White and Common Blue.

1. **Observer Field**

It appears a ten year plan was instigated in 2007 although the last report seems to be for 2013. Attempts at plug and bulb planting did not appear to be overly successful but Yellow Rattle had colonised the middle of the field although not known whether that is still there.

The Observer field is a classic lowland neutral meadow but with the benefit of having been relatively undisturbed. The site is currently grazed by a local farmer (still Bradley Woodward?) with Black Hebridean sheep which are often used for conservation grazing as they will tackle some of the tougher vegetation. Continuing grazing is likely to be the best ongoing management.

1. **Whitemans Green / Courtmead Road Allotments**

Allotments can be good areas for wildlife but no data is available. The use of pesticides and insecticides is not known.

1. **Buttinghill**

Due to delays in the handover from the developer to the PC, Buttinghill, has in a way, undergone an element of rewilding with dense stands of vegetation forming and clearly developing into a young woodland. This certainly benefitted one species, notably a Nightingale which took up residence there in 2023 although unknown if it found a partner and bred. While handover to the PC is imminent, a full ecological survey should be carried out to help devise a management plan.

1. **Hanlye Lane**

The PC may duly acquire land here after the any new development is built but it is likely to be several years before anything comes to fruition.

1. **Angela Fox Garden**

The PC continues with its project to provide a nature garden at Queens Hall, focusing on plants that provide nectar and pollen along with adding two bug hotels and a number of bird and bat boxes.

# Other Sites of Interest

1. **New England Wood**

New England Wood is 11ha of ancient semi-natural broadleaf woodland managed by a single purpose charity for the benefit of the village and as a nature reserve. It is run as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

The wood has 1.7 miles of paths maintained by a group of local volunteers who also carry out a considerable amount of conservation work.

Ash die back has had a significant effect on the wood. Since late 2022 and ongoing, many of the Ash trees (originally 25% of the wood) have been removed for safety which is providing an opportunity to restructure some areas, including adding more open space in the wood, though mostly natural regeneration will prevail.

1. **Laines Farm**

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# Parish Habitats

1. **Roadside Verges**

*Current Status*

An experiment has been taking place on Longacre Crescent where two small areas have been trialed for seeding and plug planting. Although many of the plants were annuals, there was a good degree of success particularly with the appearance of Yellow Rattle. Blue heart signs can be seen alongside denoting it is part of the Blue Campaign, founded in 2014 where the only requirement is to allow a patch of land to grow and see what plants and creatures return.

Greener Cuckfield have now been given permission to extend the trial areas further so by using a combination of seed, plugs and mowing, it will be interesting to monitor its progress from year to year.

Cuckfield bypass is the only Notable Road Verge (NRV) in the locality, being listed for Common Spotted Orchids while the rather more uncommon Dyer’s Greenweed is also said to be present, although this needs verification. NRV’s are generally just mown once a year. WSCC has also run a scheme for Community Road Verges (CRV) although is not currently accepting any more applications. However it is promoting Pollinator Highways as a way to improve and link up verges.

The PC planted wildflower turf at the verge at Ashburnham Road has been successful but is the most costly way of improving verges. Some of the verge under the Lime trees at Whiteman’s Green is also part of the Blue Campaign while one local resident on Ardingly Road has successfully turned his front garden into a wildflower meadow with a wide range of species.

*Evaluation*

Our roadside flora has changed beyond all recognition in a lifetime. Principally due to the rising fertility of roadside soils caused by increasing nitrogen levels from vehicle exhausts, coarse grasses or single species such as Cow Parsley have been able to dominate.

Exact time of cutting can be trial and error but collecting the clippings is essential, otherwise a suppressing thatch remains which further increases fertility. Disposal of arisings is always an issue but biochar may be a solution. This is a catch-all term describing any organic material that has been carbonised under high temperatures (300-1000°C) in the presence of little or no oxygen. This produces a charcoal like material that can be used for all sorts of purposes but particularly soil conditioner. It appears that a consortium project called Ricardo is developing a demonstration plant at Holmsted Farm on the Staplefield Road. While it will mainly use wood, WSCC are exploring whether grass cuttings might also be used.

Engaging with the local community and explaining the reasoning behind any management is clearly critical along with setting very clear expectations as to what might be achieved.

Keeping roads safe for motorists and pedestrians is obviously a concern.

*Objectives*

Depending on how Longacre progresses, to use this as a flagship example of how a verge could look.

To improve the biodiversity of other selected verges.

*Actions*

To investigate the possibility of improving verges at the Wheatsheaf pub, Manor Drive and at the junction between Ardingly Road and Hanlye Lane.

1. **Meadows**

*Current Status*

A Phase One Habitat Survey carried out in 2001 by a group of 12 volunteers found a number of small MG5 sites, generally on mineral soil with a pH between 5 & 6.5. Under the National Vegetation Classification (NVC), MG5 is categorised as unimproved grassland dominated by Crested Dogstail and Common Knapweed. It was once the ubiquitous type of old meadow and pasture in English lowlands and is now in sharp decline.

The meadows of Paige’s Wood LNR and the rides in the Millennium Wood (79 flora species recorded) are testimony to what is possible while the fields immediately south of Hanlye Lane and the prospective new development might be improved accordingly depending on the impact from the new development.

The land comprising the top orchard at HG is clearly MG5 and is allowed to grow for the full growing period before it is cut in September. Similarly, the adjacent parcel of land next to the pond at HG has also been allocated as a wildflower meadow. Currently it contains Yarrow, Wild Carrot, Meadow Vetchling and Birds Foot Trefoil with the occasional Tufted Vetch. The plan is to add some more species through seeding and plug planting and then to perhaps mow early in the season to reduce any coarse grasses and again in September but it will ultimately be a process of trial and error.

*Evaluation*

In the High Weald, 95% of wildflower meadows have been lost in the last 50 years.

Unimproved grasslands, if managed through correctly timed grazing and cutting, can be returned to rich wildlife areas but creating wildflower meadows is one of the hardest habitats to create and even harder to keep going, hence expectations from the public need to be set from the beginning as to what can be achieved.

The Weald Meadows Initiative was led by the High Weald AONB Partnership from 1996 to 2010 and is now the Weald Meadows Partnership who would be useful to contact if advice required.

While there is potential for improvement at HG, other PC sites are limited although Buttinghill may have some scope for meadow habitat but succession is rapidly turning it into woodland. Other locations for enhancement are the fields immediately south of Hanlye Lane and west and south of Horsgate House (dependent on development), immediately west of Warden Park school and possibly land to the east of the Scrase stream owned by the Baptist church.

*Objectives*

To improve and enhance the meadow habitats of the parish.

*Actions*

To review the survey from 2001 and update.

To initially conduct Phase 1 surveys on HG, the cemetery and Buttinghill.

To identify grassland sites which may have notable species

To identify sites and their owners where opportunities maybe available for enhancement.

1. **Woodland**

*Current Status*

Cuckfield is surrounded by scattered areas of ancient and ghyll woodland. None is of any great size – typically between 20 and 30 acres – but on the west, and to the northeast of the village there are areas closer together where there may be potential to establish corridors of woodland.

The PC has minimal woodland on its sites, but clearly a young woodland is developing fast at Buttinghill.

New England Wood, Henmead Wood and Beechy Bottom have been linked by broad-leaved plantation dating from the late 1980s while Millennium Wood (c75 acres) although outside the parish, was planted in 2000 by the Forestry Commission to be species rich, but with a leaning toward Sweet Chestnut for harvesting purposes. New England Wood although not in the parish either is clearly a great example of how a woodland can be run to benefit wildlife and has its own detailed management plan.

*Evaluation*

Evidence continues to increase as to how vital woodlands are within our environment, controlling temperature and air quality and benefitting our own wellbeing. Deadwood is an essential to the wellbeing of woodland ecosystems, providing habitats for up to a third of woodland insects. The single most important wood-decay resource for many invertebrates is a large standing living tree with columns of decay in the heartwood.

 Self-generation in woodland ecosystems is always preferred to planting where possible.

There has been considerable tree planting at Buttinghill although not clear whether this was to a longer term plan. Nevertheless there is a large amount of Hazel which would be good to compartmentalize and get on a coppice rotation. There is also plenty of Oak, some of which looks like it has self- seeded via Jays and Squirrels, which will need to be thinned to allow selected trees to grow accordingly.

*Objectives*

To improve the connectivity between woodland areas.

*Actions*

To identify areas of woodland and their owners with a view to establishing and strengthening woodland corridors.

1. **Hedges**

 *Current Status*

The Cuckfield Phase One Habitat Survey conducted in 2001, marks the species-rich hedgerows around Cuckfield as far south as the Bypass. The records compiled by the surveyors of the 52 hedgerows examined contain measurements, map references and species lists. Of the 52 hedgerows, 38 were species-rich, i.e. containing five or more species of tree and shrub. These hedgerows were re-examined in spring 2012 by David Mortimer, who found that one had been grubbed up in 2012, but the remaining 37 had not undergone any damage or deterioration in the eleven intervening years.

With funding from Lund, 50m of hedge on the western side of the Observer field was professionally laid in 2020. It will likely need relaying in a couple of years’ time but rates are typically £25-£30/m.

 *Evaluation*

A valuable habitat that provides shelter and food (nuts and berries) for a wide range of wildlife but also provides vital corridors and connectivity between habitats along with autumn colour and a degree of security.

Hedgelaying can also provide a rewarding task for volunteers and maintains a traditional craft.

Species-rich hedges can contain up to 600 plant species, 1500 kinds of invertebrates, 65 bird species and 20 mammals (Sussex Wildlife Trust’s *Hedgerow Survey of Sussex* ) and are therefore of significant ecological importance.

*Objectives*

To ensure thatCuckfield’s network of hedges is protected and enhanced.

To increase the hedge network by further planting where possible.

*Actions*

To access the survey by David Mortimer and revisit the hedges surveyed in 2012 to assess condition.

To identify where other hedges could be planted. Buttinghill may provide a couple of options

To identify any hedges that could be laid either professionally or by volunteers.

1. **Ponds**

 *Current Status*

The pond at HG is ephemeral but will still provide for a unique assemblage of plants and animals. Newts are regularly seen while Frog spawn has also been reported. Marginal plants include Marsh Marigold and Purple Loosestrife which is excellent for pollinating insects.

A thick mat of what looks like to be Water Fern (Azolla filiculoides), a non-native invasive species at the north end is creeping down the pond while native Sweet Grass (Glyceria notata) dominates the pond. It would be good to clear out at least half of the pond every other autumn but ideally material should be left at side of pond for a couple of weeks although some might be used for reinforcing the bund at the southern end.

*Newbury Pond* – while understood this is not owned by the council, the margins around the pond, particularly on the side of the main footpath are heavily vegetated probably resulting in the pond experiencing little disturbance. There is still a good amount of open water and plenty of incoming light while the alders are manageable at the moment although will need coppicing in a few years. The pond does have a population of Swan Mussels.

*Ardingly Road / Hanlye Lane Pond* – source of the R.Scrase. One of the strengths of this pond is that it is relatively undisturbed – this will likely change with the new development. There is clearly a population of fish although unknown as to what species while there are resident Moorhens and occasional Heron and Kingfisher with potentially good populations of amphibians and dragonflies/damselflies.

*Buttinghill* - It appears the pond was planted with Bulrush. A useful marginal plant, it’s good for insects, particularly emerging dragonflies and damselflies while it will also provide protection for amphibians. However, the few square metres planted at the western end of the pond have rapidly colonised the entire pond with no visible surface water. While still a habitat in its own right, the problems of succession will be accelerated with the appearance of willow further drying out the pond.

*Cuckfield Park Ponds*

Private but potentially a significant wildlife resource.

*Evaluation*

Ponds are a vital habitat resource supporting a wealth of animals and plants. However, nationally 75% of them have been lost in the last fifty years according to the RSPB.

Ponds can also be valuable for water retention and can help reduce runoff.

Digging new ponds generally requires a mini digger or larger and therefore funding but if enough volunteers are on hand, smaller ponds can be dug. Removing the spoil is always an issue and will require consideration while the local clay often means a liner is not required although the addition of bentonite to the bottom can be a safeguard.

*Objectives*

To protect our current ponds and enhance where possible.

To create new ponds where opportunities allow.

*Actions*

To survey the current ponds within the parish to record their biodiversity.

To dig out half of HG pond every other autumn.

To see if there are any sites where new ponds could be introduced.

# Parish Species

1. **Swift**

*Current Status*

SBRC has about twenty records with breeding pairs located at Ivy Cottages (Whiteman’s Green), Myrtle Cottages (Ardingly Road), Brainsmead and Cuckfield Park although only two records are for this current decade with the last in 2022.

Greener Cuckfield has already commenced efforts on helping this species by organising Swift ‘evening monitoring’ walks in May and June this year, in order to establish where birds maybe nesting. Their results found two sites in the village with seven pairs. Plans are now afoot to get funding from Sussex Ornithological Society to buy more boxes to help strengthen these colonies and the local population.

The PC has been working with Holy Trinity church to look at installing Swift boxes in the Church belfry. This is ongoing and dependent on acquiring a faculty but Sussex Ornithological Society’s Swift Champion Dave Boddington will also be involved while the High Weald Nature & Community Fund (previously Lund) have also shown an interest in funding.

*Evaluation*

These birds do everything on the wing, including eating, sleeping and mating and only land when they’re ready to nest. They can fly 500 miles a day and live for as long as 20 years. Swifts eat about 20,000 insects a day and can catch 300-1000 flying insects in one go when feeding their young.

However, the population of these amazing birds has plummeted by around 60% in the last three decades. This has primarily been due to the declining insect population but increasing numbers of renovations of old buildings has meant a lack of suitable places to nest particularly under eaves and in roofs. Attracting swifts to boxes can be successful but often takes time. Birds are communal so a minimum of two to three boxes is usually best while sound equipment playing the calls to attract birds is also required. Swift boxes generally cost around £30-40.

*Objectives*

To further publicise the plight of this bird.

To enhance the current population.

*Actions*

To continue to organise Swift walks and talks and to involve as many residents as possible in reporting sightings of Swifts.

To undertake monthly surveys from May 2025 to August 2025

To advise and support residents who wish to buy and install their own nest box.

1. **Hedgehog**

*Current Status*

SBRC only has a dozen records with sightings from Whiteman’s Green, Woodhall Close and Hatchlands with the last record from 2017.

Greener Cuckfield have carried out a considerable amount of work already for this species by providing leaflets about how to help Hedgehogs and asking for sightings. An exciting project to initiate a ‘Hedgehog Highway’ scheme at Manor Road by drilling holes in walls, fences and hedges will further allow these animals greater freedom as they roam looking for food. Depending on the success of this it may be possible for other schemes to be rolled out across the village or parish.

*Evaluation*

Around 60 years ago, 36 million were snuffling around in UK gardens. Today there are thought to be closer to one million left. The reasons for this huge decline vary but the use of slug pellets, warmer winters leading to disturbed hibernation, habitat reduction and an increase in badgers are all likely to have had an impact. Garden walls and fences can also be very effective barriers to animals being able to move around while over tidiness in gardens can reduce food sources.

While hedgehogs do not generally eat the larger slugs, they will take some of the smaller ones which all help keen gardeners to preserve at least some of their favourite plants and crops.

In recent years, new schemes such as ‘Hedgehog highways’ have come to the fore while Hedgehog Street is a national campaign run by PTES (Peoples Trust for Endangered Species) and BHPS (British Hedgehog Preservation Society). Having a species champion can be very beneficial.

Surveying hedgehogs is not easy but sightings reported by the public can be helpful, although camera trapping is likely to be the most effective way, particularly near where holes have been drilled into walls or fences. Cameras can cost in the order of £100-£200 so funding would be required while cameras are prone to being stolen so careful sighting is required.

*Objectives*

To establish if there are any ‘hot spots’ in the village with regards to the local population.

To publicise and educate local residents as to the plight of this species.

*Actions*

To encourage the public to report their sightings – via Greener / Cuckfield Life / Whats app group?

To publicise any results from Manor Drive and assess whether possible to extend scheme to other sites.

To encourage people to make their gardens more accessible and hedgehog friendly. e.g. providing nesting boxes.

1. **Butterflies**

*Current Status*

SBRC has records for some interesting species including White Admiral (New England Wood), Purple Emperor (Paige’s & Millenium Woods) and both Grizzled and Dingy skippers.

In the summer of 2023, one garden reported 19 different species although many were just single sightings. Marbled White and Brown Hairstreak appear to be on the increase although Small Tortoiseshell which was once one of our most prolific species is now heading towards rarity status.

From provisional data so far from Butterfly Conservation, it maybe that 2024 could be one of the worst ever summers for our butterflies.

*Evaluation*

Butterflies are threatened by a variety of sources, including intensive farming and associated insecticides and pesticides, habitat isolation and loss, pollution (particularly Nitrogen) and climate change.

Many butterfly species are ‘generalists’ but others need specific habitat features, including the plants that their caterpillars feed on, the flowers adults prefer for nectar and the conditions needed for shelter and over-wintering.

While not included in this plan, it should be noted that moths maybe even more important pollinators than both butterflies and bees together.

Butterfly transects are the best way of recording butterflies. However, this is a time commitment and ruled by the weather. The parish does not lend itself easily to setting up transects due to the fragmented nature of sites but mini transects around individual sites may be an option particularly for HG, Buttinghill and the cemetery. Butterfly Conservation usually have a local rep who will provide initial help on setting up transects while the Field Studies Council laminated Wild ID guides are superb for illustrations and ease of carrying.

*Objectives*

To gain a better understanding of the parish’s butterfly populations and habitats.

*Actions*

To obtain baseline data for the current butterfly populations with the parish.

To set up transects for HG, Buttinghill and the Cemetery.

To encourage more people to participate in the Big Butterfly Count, a leading citizen science project.

To encourage more people to make their gardens butterfly friendly.

1. **Bats**

*Current Status*

From SBRC records, four species have been identified including Serotine, Whiskered Bat, Common Pipistrelle and Brown Long-eared Bat. The majority of records are from the 90’s and noughties with the last record received in 2019. The characteristic hanging tiles of some of Cuckfield’s buildings could well be popular sites for roosting but whether there are any specific roosts within the village or parish is unknown.

The Sussex Bat group monitored the Millennium Wood in 2011 and recorded the presence of Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Long-eared Bat, Noctule and Serotine. Blunts and Paige’s Woods have been monitored by the Sussex Bat group and recorded Daubenton, Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Long-eared bat, Noctule and Serotine.

*Evaluation*

Bats are important indicator species for ecological health. However spring and summer 2024 have not been good for bats with an increase of under-weight or even starving individuals, many being juveniles. While this is likely due to the wet and cold weather reducing the insect population, bats are suffering due to disturbed hibernation from climate change and the decline in insects generally.

Bats are very sensitive to atmospheric conditions and will consequently use a whole range of different roost sites while rides, glades, streams, ponds and hedges will all be used for hunting. They will not generally fly where there is a gap of more than ten metres along a tree line, so preserving flight lines and their associated trees or vegetation also needs consideration, particularly in light of the number of dying Ash trees. Where trees are problematic, crown reducing or pollarding are always favourable methods to felling although this may be the only option for unsafe or dangerous trees.

Light levels are another factor. *Myotis* species of bat cannot easily tolerate light levels above 1 lux (moonlight) with most routine feeding taking place at less than 0.4 lux. Considerable work has been carried out in recent years that has discovered that while bats generally don’t interact well with white light, red light, in contrast, is wildlife-friendly and enables bats to fly and feed normally.

AudioMoth is a low-cost, full-spectrum acoustic logger and can be very useful for confirming presence of various bat species. While the devices are relatively east to set up, the main issue is finding someone who is able to correctly analyse the data which requires some expertise.

There is however considerable interest from the public regarding bats with bat walks generally being very well attended. It may be possible to get the Sussex Bat group to do a walk around the village – they usually bring several bat detectors which the kids love.

*Objectives*

To gain a better understanding of the species and populations that currently live within the parish.

*Actions*

To invite the Sussex Bat group to lead some walks around the village to spark wider interest.

To start some survey work at HG with two audiomoths from spring 2025.

1. **Great Crested Newt**

 *Current Status*

SBRC has five records with two from Copyhold Lane south of the A272 and another at or near the Courtmead Road allotments. Other records are closer to Bolnore while they have supposedly been present for many years in Newbury Pond.

*Evaluation*

The Great Crested Newt is the largest of our three native newt species (up to 20cm long) where males in breeding condition have a well-developed, jagged crest along the back. They can live for 17 years but more usually just 7 or 8 years. Most of the life cycle is spent on land, adults returning to their breeding sites, typically ponds as early as February. During the winter, adult and immature newts hibernate in frost-free areas such as well- drained soil, hedgerow bases, old walls and piles of rubble.

The Great Crested Newt can travel up to 0.5km from ponds so it is important to conserve both aquatic and terrestrial habitat and being sensitive to environmental change, require various types of habitat in close proximity – woodland, pasture, hedgerow, scrub and rank grassland that provide good cover and foraging in summer and hibernation sites in winter with suitable freshwater sites for breeding during spring. Creating log/brush piles around ponds provides places for newts to secrete themselves and hibernate but care must be taken that they are not disturbed.

A license is required to survey this species so would require a professional ecologist.

*Objectives*

To establish size and locations of current population.

Dependent on above, devise any conservation enhancements to help this species.

*Actions*

To establish from historical records, locations and dates of previous sightings.

To engage an ecologist to conduct surveys around the ponds of the parish.

1. **Glow Worm**

*Current Status*

Ollie!

*Evaluation*

Glow worms are in fact beetles. The bright greenish-yellow glow is produced by the female by chemical reactions within her body and is to attract the flying males to mate. Adult Glow worms are active between June and August in a short summer breeding period, during which they do not feed and after which they die. The eggs hatch into larvae after a few weeks, remaining as larvae for one or two further summers, feeding on small snail species.

In terms of habitat requirements, reasonably short grass is required so sites becoming overgrown can be a problem but it is advised not to cut during the glow worm season. The UK Glow Worm survey encourages people to report sightings and has been going since 1990 while some sites now organise annual night time safaris or walks to see these creatures.

*Objectives*

Raise awareness of the presence of Glow worms and the need to conserve populations.

Maintain the range and abundance of the existing Glow worm population and if possible create areas for their potential expansion.

*Actions*

Start annual count of female glowworms.

Initiate habitat management to conserve or enhance existing sites.

 **7. Delivery**

1. **Stakeholders**

The PC is the principal stakeholder in this plan although Greener Cuckfield will be likely to have a significant role too. It is hoped that other stakeholders, particularly landowners may also come forward as the plan develops.

1. **Ecological surveying and ongoing monitoring**

Potentially, there could be an enormous amount of surveying and monitoring that could be undertaken but this will be limited by the availability and cost of any professional ecologists and by the number of volunteers who express an interest to become involved. They in turn will be dependent on their own experience, time and the amount of surveying kit and equipment that may be available.

One potential option is the Southwood Foundation that provides (free?) professional ecological services to community groups and could be instrumental in initiating survey work. It may also be possible to invite Sussex Wildlife Trust who at least maybe able to offer advice or useful contacts.

1. **Community engagement (volunteers, land owners, schools?)**

Community Engagement will be key, particularly related to Citizen Science where local schools could make a significant contribution. However, accessing schools and trying to fit in with their tight time schedules and curriculums is not easy.

While some surveying will need to be conducted by professional ecologists, identifying some volunteers in the early stages of the BAP who can carry out survey work will be essential. Therefore publicizing and promoting the plan to the parish will be instrumental. There is also considerable potential to establish a core of volunteers to undertake working parties to help manage some sites, particularly Horsefield Green and Buttinghill.

1. **Funding**

This plan would only look to the PC for funding where S106 monies were available, currently HG and hopefully, Buttinghill.

Other aspects of the plan, particularly Swifts would be of interest to the High Weald Nature & Community Fund (previously Lund).

Landfill Community grants are also a possibility, particularly Veolia’s Sustainability Fund and BIFFA’s Award for Rebuilding Biodiversity. Generally these waste / recycling companies will not fund government or local authority bodies but this would not preclude local organisations such as Greener Cuckfield from applying.

Other funders might also include Sussex Ornithological Society and the Hall and Woodhouse Community Chest.