



Annual Report

2020-21

Foreword

2020-21 has been an extraordinary year for many reasons. The planet has been gripped by a global pandemic which has brought with it personal, economic and social impacts which will prevail for years to come. Meanwhile, the twin challenges of the climate and biodiversity emergencies remain and the need to respond and act locally becomes ever more urgent. Sussex Nature Partnership and its members have worked exceptionally hard this year to find a way to work together and add value – seeking to align with evolving policy around the recovery of the natural environment and drive forward our work under 6 key themes. These themes reflect our focus on protecting and enhancing the natural capital of Sussex and ensuring that this delivers benefits for people. Achievements and activity under each theme are presented in this first Annual Report and illustrate that despite the many constraints on working together under COVID 19 restrictions, Sussex Nature Partnership has gone from strength to strength and is developing a momentum and impact that is making a real difference at the local level. My heartfelt thanks to all our partners for their continued commitment to collaborative working and to those who support the work of the partnership through their donations of time and funding.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kate Rice'.

Kate Rice
Chair Sussex Nature Partnership:
Natural Capital Strategy Manager, Southern Water

About Sussex Nature Partnership

Sussex Nature Partnership (SxNP) was formally established in 2014 and brings together more than 25 organisations in Sussex, across seven different sectors. Its purpose is to “work across sectors and organisations to secure the healthiest ecological system possible thereby protecting and enhancing the natural environment and all that it gives us”.

To enact this vision, the work of the Nature Partnership is guided by two high-level objectives:

- 1 Conserve, enhance and expand Sussex’s natural capital**
Growth in natural capital is the fundamental pre-requisite for enhancing the services provided by ecosystems and so underpins the economic and social well-being of Sussex. SxNP will promote the greening of the economy including the need to invest in nature because of the many benefits and essential services it provides.
- 2 Ensure that Sussex residents share in the benefits provided by healthy, well-functioning ecosystems**
The Nature Partnership will aim to improve the connection between people, their environment and the benefits they get from the environment. This will cover a broad spectrum of activities including health, well-being, social and economic areas. In order to deliver growth in natural capital and share in the benefits of healthy ecosystems, the Nature Partnership will ensure that the evidence is collated to promote concepts, projects and initiatives that support the positive development of ecosystem services in Sussex. This will be shared across all sectors and audiences.

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Old Lodge Nature Reserve © Tom Lee/Sussex Wildlife Trust
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Meetings, Resources and Communications

SxNP Board Meetings

Sussex Nature Partnership Board met four times during 2020-21:

- › 09 March 2021
- › 08 December 2020
- › 06 October 2020
- › 30 June 2020

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all meetings this year have taken place online.

Funding

During 2020-21 SxNP was supported by:

- › East Sussex County Council
- › West Sussex County Council
- › South Downs National Park Authority
- › Sussex Wildlife Trust

Resources

East Sussex County Council continued to provide secretariat support for the Nature Partnership and expanded this role to include administrative support for online events. Julie Middleton continued to work as policy lead for the Nature Partnership on a part-time consultancy basis.

Communication

The branding and website for the partnership are in the process of re-development with launch due early next financial year. Sussex Nature Partnership now has social media presence on both Twitter and Instagram.

Nature Recovery Networks and Local Nature Recovery Strategies

The Environment Bill worked slowly through some of its parliamentary stages in 2020-21. Sussex Nature Partnership remains committed to understanding how its key mechanisms might be implemented in practice and to ensuring its members are fully briefed and prepared for implementation once the time comes. It also sees an opportunity to work with Natural England and others to pilot local application of the concepts contained in the Bill and to influence emerging government guidance as it is developed.

2020-21 thus saw the start of a priority work strand around 'Nature Recovery Networks' and how these might be created via 'Local Nature Recovery Strategies'.

October 2020: SxNP contributed to the publication of a set of **Joint Principles for Nature Recovery Networks across the South East** by South East Nature Partnership (SENP). These principles will help to underpin a coherent approach to planning for nature recovery networks at the regional level.

In December 2020 SxNP was commissioned by Natural England to carry out a small **mapping and engagement project** with three local authorities (Wealden DC, Rother DC and Eastbourne BC). This will work

with existing spatial data sets to develop thoughts on a framework for mapping the key components of a nature recovery network for these areas. Engagement with the three local authorities will help to identify how this information can be used by strategic planners to guide their own work and to identify opportunities for delivery of habitat creation through the planning process and on local authority landholdings.

Project duration December 2020 – April 2021

The **Nature Recovery Network Working Group** was established in January 2021 with Claire Kerr (South Downs NPA) taking the Chair. This working group is currently developing its Statement of Purpose and a set of priorities for 2021-22.

Biodiversity Net Gain

This work strand also flows from the emerging Environment Bill. The focus of the Nature Partnership this year has been to understand how the net gain approach might be implemented in practice and to provide training and knowledge sharing on this topic for local authorities.

Three online events were held aimed primarily at local authority officers and elected members:

- › **Biodiversity Net Gain and Nature Recovery Networks**, 11 December 2020 >75 attendees
- › Presentation to Rother District Planning Committee and Parish Councils on



Kelp © Dan Smale/Sussex Wildlife Trust Trust

Biodiversity Net Gain and the Planning System, February 2021 >50 attendees

- › **Planning for Wildlife – delivering biodiversity net gain through the planning system**, 19 March 2021 >170 attendees

Presentations from the webinars are available on the SxLNP website: <http://sussexlnp.org.uk/natures-recovery-and-net-gain>

Planning

The Nature Partnership submitted a response to the government consultation on **Planning for the Future White Paper** in October 2020 and contributed to a joint South East Nature Partnership response to the same consultation.

The Sussex Nature Partnership 'Neighbourhood Plan Guidance' was completed and published on the website in August 2020. <http://sussexlnp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/LNP-NP-guidance.pdf>

Sussex Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) Initiative

This year saw the launch of the **Local Wildlife Sites System for Sussex** (spatial data management system) for use by Record Centre Partners.

The LWS Officer (employed by Sussex WT and funded by SxNP partners) continued to survey sites and update the information base.

2020-21 update: 13 sites were removed as LWS (no longer recognised); 40 new LWS were added and information was updated for a further 95 LWS. See <https://lws-sussex.org.uk/>

Natural Capital Investment Strategy – Progress

See the appendix for a brief progress report on elements of the **Natural Capital Investment Strategy** (SxLNP 2019) implemented this year.

Clean Growth Principles

In May 2020, Sussex Nature Partnership worked with other LNPs across the South East to develop a set of **Clean Growth Principles for embedding a zero carbon nature-based approach in Economic Recovery**. These principles were supported by an evidence base and were in response to the opportunity presented to government post-Covid to develop a green economic recovery.

Kate Rice, as Chair of SxNP, added her name to a **letter from Chairs of the South East Nature Partnerships to all Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) in the South East and to all top tier local authorities**. This letter presented the clean growth nature-based principles and offered to discuss how these could be embedded in local green recovery strategies. Sussex Nature Partnership followed this up with a letter to all Sussex MPs informing them of the work of the Nature Partnership in this area and urging them to encourage the LEPs to adopt the clean growth principles.

New Partnerships

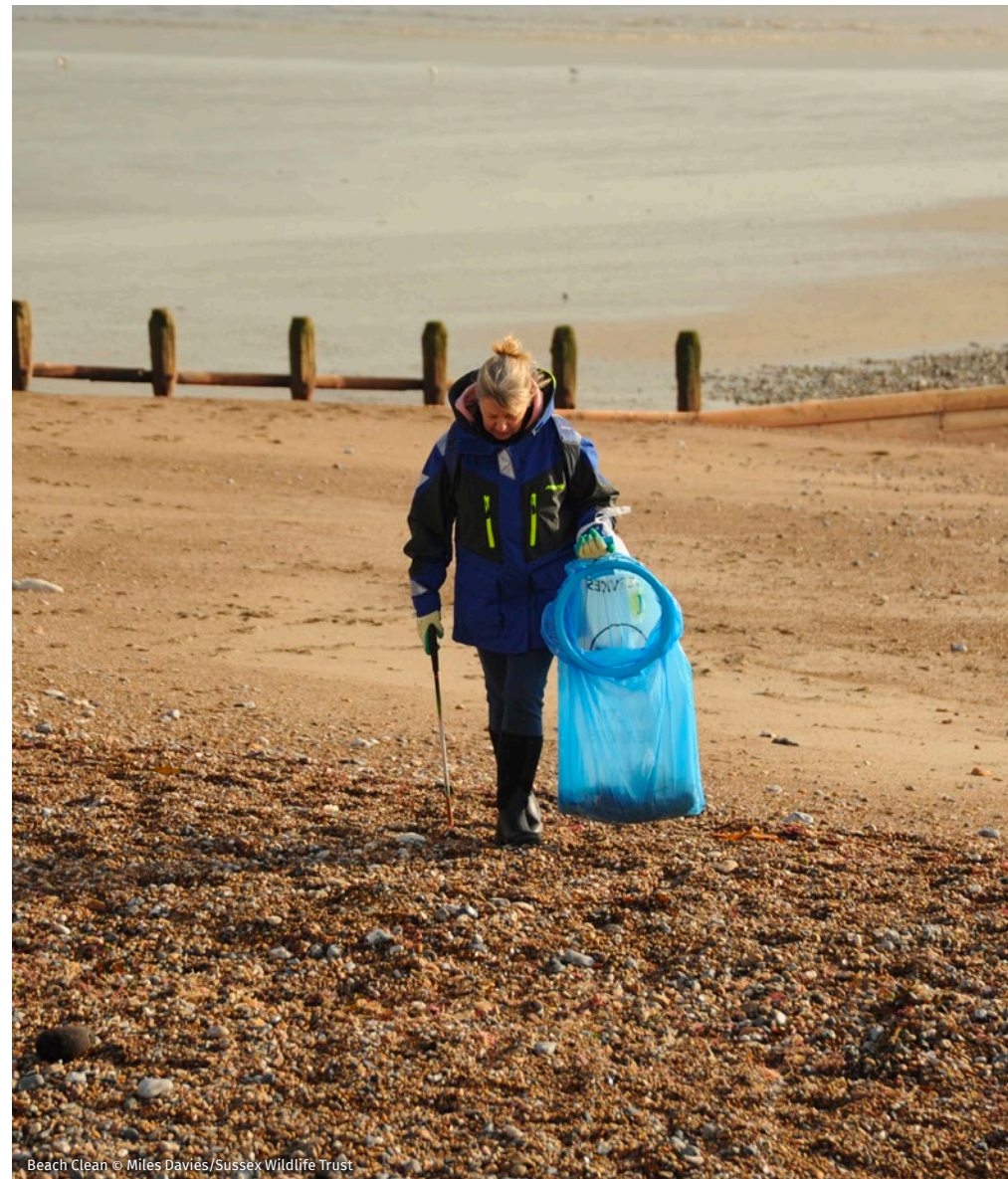
In November, the LNP was asked to give a presentation on its work (with a focus on nature-based solutions for carbon sequestration) to the **Green Growth Platform Board** meeting.

This presentation has resulted in a new partnership with the Green Growth Platform and the Clean Growth Hub (based at the University of Brighton) for the Nature Partnership in the area of green growth and nature-based solutions.

Work already emerging from this collaboration includes:

- ▶ Input into project development (University of Sussex/ University of Brighton joint habitat/carbon project)
- ▶ Development of a funding bid to the South East Local Enterprise Partnership ([see Theme 4](#))

This collaboration has also increased the reach and influence of the Nature Partnership by creating a wider network of contacts in the business and academic sectors.



Beach Clean © Miles Davies/Sussex Wildlife Trust

NATURAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Connecting people and nature

2020-21 saw the re-launch and rejuvenation of the 'Health and Wellbeing Working Group' drawing new members from across the Health sector, eNGOs, Tier 1 local authorities, academic institutions, community-based organisations and the South Downs National Park Authority. This group has agreed its Statement of Purpose and priorities and is preparing a work plan for the coming year. The group is Chaired by Penny Shimmin (Sussex Community Development Association).

Publicly Owned Greenspaces

A core area of work for the LNP in 2020-21, was development of a project for **re-visioning publicly owned greenspaces.**

Evolving from initial thinking by Adur and Worthing Councils, this project is intended to expand the way in which park managers and local authorities understand and think about the parks and greenspaces in their care. It will use eight case study greenspaces (four in Adur/Worthing and four in Wealden District) to develop methodologies for assessing

the wide range of benefits delivered by parks/greenspaces for nature and people. It will include natural capital assessment, engagement with local people and user groups and assessment of health benefits of a sample of parks/greenspaces to collate information that can help to develop new, more ambitious visions for the case study areas. The methodologies developed and the findings for the case study sites will be disseminated across local authorities, town and parish councils in Sussex.

Project duration: March 2021 – January 2022

Project development: Sussex Nature Partnership

Project funding: South Downs National Park Authority; East Sussex County Council (Public Health)



This work stream grew steadily throughout 2020-21 as interest in the potential for habitats to store and sequester carbon increased in response to climate emergency planning across sectors.

Nature-Based Solutions for Carbon Storage and Sequestration

In June 2020, Sussex Nature Partnership identified the need for 'carbon metrics' to assist with calculation of the potential of a range of habitats to store and sequester carbon. Such metrics exist for woodland and peatland but not for the remaining terrestrial and coastal habitats found across Sussex and the South East. Lack of such metrics creates a significant barrier to the development of nature-based carbon sequestration projects. This document was shared with South East Nature Partnership and was used in a low-key way to approach decision-makers. Further direct advocacy work targeting Natural England and Defra is required in 2021.

Two events were held this year aimed at raising awareness of nature-based solutions for carbon storage and sequestration. These were very much in response to demand from SxNP members and local authorities eager to learn more about this subject in the context of climate emergency planning, carbon offsetting and new finance streams for habitat creation. Contributors from across

business, academic, local government and eNGO sectors were brought together to cover this complex area of emerging theory and practice.

Event 1: Nature-based solutions for carbon, 30 March 2020. This event was due to be hosted by RBG Kew at Wakehurst Place and had attracted over 80 attendees. However, it had to be cancelled at the last minute due to the first Covid 19 lockdown. The presentations prepared by contributors were, however, uploaded on the SxNP website for information.



Tree Planting © Sam Roberts/Sussex Wildlife Trust

Event 2: Nature-based solutions to carbon storage and sequestration, online, 25 January 2021 >100 attendees.

Presentations from both events are available on the SxLNP website:

<http://sussexlnp.org.uk/sussex-lnp-carbon-event/>

Presentations by the Nature Partnership on nature-based solutions for carbon sequestration were also given to East Sussex County Council (Elected Members) (October 2020) and the Green Growth Platform (September 2020).

Woodland Opportunity Mapping Project

The collaboration with the Clean Growth Hub provided an opportunity to access a GIS student placement (University of Brighton) to carry out 40 days of work. A project was developed in partnership with Lewes District Council to develop a framework for mapping constraints and opportunities for woodland creation. This project is currently underway.

Funding Application to South East Local Enterprise Partnership

The most ambitious piece of work under this theme this year was development of a funding application to the 'Sector Support Fund' of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP).

This application is currently under consideration and a decision will be made by end March 2021.

In summary, if successful, the funding will provide the market analysis, skills development and framework for a 'brokerage hub' for nature-based solutions for carbon sequestration. This will facilitate the development of nature-based carbon offsetting projects in the SELEP region, assisting local authorities and businesses to move towards net-zero whilst investing in the natural capital of the local area.

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE LNP

Ensuring the future success of the partnership

Sussex Nature Partnership carried out a review of its structure and governance arrangements in early 2020. This resulted in an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of existing arrangements and reflection on the models adopted by other successful LNPs across the country.

Financial sustainability of SxNP remains a concern particularly if funding to key supporters falls and they can no longer support the work of the Nature Partnership. Work therefore remains to address this and to find a more sustainable business model. Work will continue on this throughout 2021-22.

However, the review did result in changes to the SxNP structure and ways of working to deliver greater effectiveness, impact and professionalism. These included:

Executive Team

An **Executive Team** was formally established in 2020 to support the Secretariat/Consultant in guiding day-to-day work planning and decision-making. This group meets monthly and ahead of all Board meetings. It comprises: Kate Rice (Southern Water, Chair SxNP); Henri Brocklebank (Sussex Wildlife Trust, Vice-Chair SxNP); Kate Cole (East Sussex County Council, SxNP Secretariat); Gillian Branson; Julie Middleton (Consultant/ Policy Lead).

Terms of Reference for this group were approved by the SxNP Board in October 2020.

Working Groups

The past working groups of SxNP were largely dormant. The areas of work presented in the Natural Capital Investment Strategy indicated the need to revive and create working groups to provide the drive and guidance for priority areas of work. In 2020 the **Health and Wellbeing Working Group** was re-launched with a wider membership. A new **Nature Recovery Network** working group was created in early 2021 to guide this important and emerging area of work.

A standard Terms of Reference were approved by the SxNP Board in Oct 2020 for all working groups. Each group is required to develop its own 'Statement of Purpose' and Annual Work Plan, to feed into the SxNP annual work planning process. The chair of each working group is required to provide a brief report to the Board each quarter.

The Executive Team had initially envisaged the creation of a 'Local Authority Engagement Working Group' to provide guidance on the many different areas of interest to local authorities. However, on further discussion it was felt that a more suitable approach would be to continue with a theme-based programme of training/awareness raising events for local authorities and to encourage district/ borough councils to join the partnership and become more actively involved in working groups. A proposal to local

authorities is currently being developed to encourage engagement with the Nature Partnership.

New working groups may be established in 2020-21 if required.

Secretariat

ESCC continues to provide the main secretariat for SxNP and has bolstered this with additional support for online event management. However, Working Groups are now encouraged to provide their own secretariat support in order to share the workload and to take some of this burden from ESCC. This is contained within the Terms of Reference.

Annual Meeting

The March meeting of Sussex Nature Partnership will become the main annual review/planning meeting for the year. This will elect the Chair, consider the annual report for the year and approve an outline annual work plan for the year.

LNP Board

No decision was made in relation to membership of the SxNP Board. This is currently large and may struggle to remain effective if membership of SxNP increases but was felt to encourage an inclusive and collegial culture of working.

It therefore remains unchanged with a review to be deferred until 2022.



Woods Mill Nature Reserve © Sam Roberts/Sussex Wildlife Trust

COLLECTIVE ACTION

Working with others to amplify impact and influence

South East Nature Partnership

Increasing collaboration and discussion between neighbouring LNPs in the South East led to formal creation of the South East Nature Partnership in 2020. This is a partnership between Sussex, Surrey, Kent and Hampshire/Isle of Wight Nature Partnerships who will work together on common priorities. Terms of Reference have been agreed and at present, the partnership will meet quarterly, with the Chair rotating between the four member LNPs. The Secretariat for the SENP is provided by Kent County Council (which also provides secretariat for Kent LNP).

Significant work by the SENP has been mentioned in the Themes above but includes:

- ▶ Principles for a green recovery – and associated letters to LEPs and Tier 1 local authorities
- ▶ Workshop on ‘working with others on our green recovery’ (October 2020)
- ▶ Joint Principles for Nature Recovery Networks across the South East



East Sussex Environment Board

Kate Rice in her capacity as Chair of Sussex Nature Partnership, now sits on the East Sussex Environment Board and has been elected Vice-Chair of this Board for 2020-21.

Other Engagement and Activity

Presentation to Surrey Nature Partnership Conference (February 2021) on spatial planning for nature (from BOAs to LNRS).



NATURAL CAPITAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY (2019)¹

Implementation: Progress Report 2020-21

The Natural Capital Investment Strategy was adopted by SxNP in 2019. This is a comprehensive and ambitious set of actions required to secure and improve the natural capital of Sussex.

Given its limited resources, SxNP has not been able to focus on all areas of the strategy in 2020-21. However, the following table demonstrates how some key areas of work align with the strategy and further its delivery.

Going forward, annual work planning for the Nature Partnership will focus on the strategy and prioritise elements within it to inform future work.

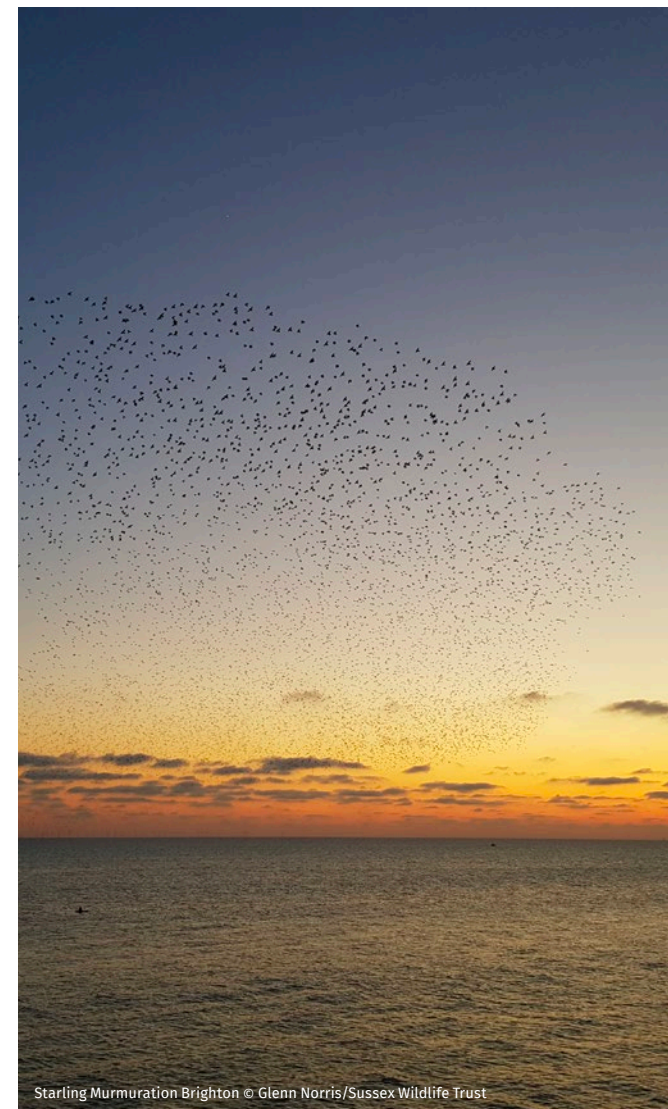


Seaford Head © Sam Roberts/Sussex Wildlife Trust

Section	Strategy	Implementation
6 i) a)	No further loss of Natural Capital at Risk from development: Alert mapping showing location of assets at risk	Initial use of natural capital at risk mapping in 'Wilder Horsham' project (Sussex WT) and SxNP NE mapping project for Wealden, Rother and Eastbourne.
6 i) c)	Reduce pressure on 'at risk' assets: Include at risk assets in NRN mapping for Sussex	Findings from the mapping projects above being used to understand how best to include 'natural capital at risk' in 'local habitat mapping' for LNRS preparation in Sussex.
6 ii)	Strategic enhancement of natural capital assets: SxNP leads the way in development of strategic approach to creation of NRN across Sussex. Work to embed NRN in strategic planning documents	NRN Working Group now established to provide collaborative approach to thinking on mapping and development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies. Wealden/Rother/Eastbourne and Wilder Horsham projects exploring links between NRN mapping and strategic planning at district level
6 iii)	Soil – Raise the profile of soil as a natural capital asset Communicate the importance of soil natural capital	Soil as a carbon store has been included as a focus of presentations on nature-based carbon solutions in both LNP carbon events.
7	Using natural capital to deliver priority benefits for people and the economy	Natural Capital Investment Area maps applied to NRN mapping projects mentioned above; intention is to investigate how to integrate these into NRN development for Sussex via the work of the NRN Working Group.
	Accessible Nature: Work with SDNPA, local authorities, parishes and other sectors to bring forward projects for investment in greenspaces	Working Group re-established to drive work in this area. LNP Greenspace project with Adur and Worthing/ Wealden District Council, ESCC and SDNPA – direct delivery of this.
	Improved Climate Regulation Increase opportunities for investment in natural capital to protect and increase carbon storage and sequestration Promote strategic approach to tree planting in Sussex	Two events on nature-based approaches to carbon storage held this year – designed to increase 'carbon-literacy' across members and others. Advocacy work on carbon metrics designed to facilitate investment and project development. SELEP bid directly aligned with this. University of Brighton GIS student project on woodland opportunity mapping for Lewes DC – directly relevant.

¹ <http://sussexlnp.org.uk/sussex-natural-capital-investment-strategy/>

Section	Strategy	Implementation
8	Making it happen	
	Engage across sectors	Greater engagement with health sector via Health and Well-being Working Group. Engagement with wider network of academic and business contacts via Clean Growth Hub.
	Embed natural capital in decision-making processes	NRN projects and discussions identifying how to embed natural capital in strategic planning processes.
	Learn from pioneers in the field	The network of contacts for the SxNP has grown significantly this year – and opportunities have been taken to connect and learn from others. NRN, carbon and accessible nature work are particularly helpful in expanding knowledge held within SxNP.
	Share knowledge and develop expertise within the LNP	Four knowledge sharing events held in 2020-21 (and numerous other presentations) to raise knowledge and understanding across SxNP membership.
	Influence emerging policy and practice	NRN and carbon work by SxNP is at forefront of thinking nationally and channels into NE/Defra are being used to feedback lessons learned.
	Develop project pipeline	SxNP has successfully brought forward two project concepts this year to delivery. Lessons are being learned on how to structure projects and what the best role for the SxNP should be. Much more work to be done in this area.
	Develop metrics to confirm project outcomes	The SxNP Greenspace project will make some progress on this front – identifying natural capital and social indicators for parks/ greenspaces. Carbon metric work is also flagging the need for more formal metrics (widely endorsed) for measurement of multiple benefits by natural capital projects.
	Develop data and data management services needed	NRN work is in partnership with the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre and is enabling innovation in developing a suitable mapping framework for Sussex.
	More detailed investment plan	No progress to date.
	Establish LNP Governance structures and functions required	Review of SxNP governance in 2020 carried out to improve effectiveness.





Sussex Nature Partnership 2021

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