



WIVELSFIELD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Environment and Countryside Focus Group
closing Report

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ENVIRONMENT & COUNTRYSIDE FOCUS GROUP REPORT

including History, Landscape and Biodiversity

Aims:

To ensure that the protection of the environment and countryside in Wivelsfield Parish is clearly defined in the Neighbourhood Plan and to safeguard specific issues that have been identified as important by residents, such as:

- the preservation of green field and natural wildlife habitat, and support for farming practices and countryside management that have created these
- conservation and enhancement of the historic built environment
- recreation areas, and access to these via footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes
- to recognise that increased housing will impact on the quality of the parish environment and to explore how this impact may be managed sustainably

This will deliver a sustainable community, defined by AiRS Rural Place Profile as environmentally sensitive, providing places for people to live that are considerate of the environment. The Plan should empower the residents and provide a structure for them to take ownership of the facilities in the parish and create new opportunities and projects to improve the quality of life for community.

SWOT Analysis:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p><i>Rural surroundings/outstanding landscape setting (open spaces, ancient woodland, flower rich meadows, bluebell woods.</i></p> <p><i>High quality environment supporting good ecosystems (wide variety of flora and fauna, unpolluted natural ponds and streams)</i></p> <p><i>Rich historical heritage (listed buildings, conservation area)</i></p> <p><i>Good network of paths giving access to open spaces and woods</i></p>	<p><i>Vulnerable to urban encroachment from Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill eroding the rural setting of the village with detrimental effect on the environment, wildlife and the parish as a whole</i></p> <p><i>Drainage issues (bad drainage and risk of flash flooding, surface water flooding some areas inaccessible after heavy rain)</i></p> <p><i>Cumulative loss of local heritage/vulnerability of archaeological remains</i></p>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<p><i>Develop a lasting policy for protecting biodiversity</i></p> <p><i>provision of an off-road cycle path network through the village to keep children in particular safe</i></p> <p><i>Protect our green fields and woodland for future generations to enjoy</i></p> <p><i>Extend conservation area</i></p>	<p><i>Urban encroachment from Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill swallowing up green gaps + ever increasing leisure use by BHill & HH residents (walkers, mountain bikers, runners) creating car parking issues, footpath & stile maintenance, dog poo bin needs, litter problems</i></p> <p><i>Excessive housing and business development within the parish</i></p> <p><i>Lack of good agricultural management on certain farms</i></p> <p><i>The Environment Agency allowing the dumping of waste materials & vehicle parks on agricultural land</i></p>

Context and History:

Wivelsfield is a watershed between the tributaries of the Adur, draining westwards, and the Ouse, draining east. East/west ridges of higher ground run to the north and south of this. The varied habitat provided by damp water meadows and higher land, often wooded, has nurtured a rich variety of wild life and human activity over the centuries.

Farming settlements have existed in Wivelsfield since at least Celtic times and the 'field' or 'feld' mentioned in the mid-8th century charter (Sussex Anglo-Saxon Charters, Part 1 in SAC lxxxvi, 42-101), means 'open area', synonymous with arable land and a farming community. The pattern of scattered farmsteads continued over the centuries and formed the green and pleasant landscape treasured by the overwhelming proportion of respondents (87.4%) to the recent Housing Survey (AiRS Report Appendix 5.2)

The countryside is actively farmed, primarily for livestock or livestock foodstuffs. On some farms both informal and, increasingly, formal land stewardship is undertaken for the benefit of wildlife. The rural character is much cherished by all residents.

BIODIVERSITY:

There is a rich biodiversity with many habitats of importance to wildlife, few of which are currently protected. This richness extends into the built-up boundary where wildlife is more diverse than in typical urban areas as can be seen from the Sussex Biodiversity Centre Report

EVIDENCE GATHERED / WORK UNDERTAKEN (SUMMARY)

During the course of our interviews, discussions with and talking to attendees at the Annual Parish Meeting (APM) and NP Open Meeting, a number of issues have been raised that the Focus Group feel should be looked at in advance of the publication of the Plan.



Traditional shaw of trees acting as a wildlife corridor



Bridleway through ancient woodland

ANCIENT WOODS AND TREES

Ancient woodland is defined as land that has been continually wooded since at least 1600AD. Ancient woodland is home to twice as many species of conservation concern than any other habitat. Wivelsfield has lost a large proportion of its ancient woodland and the conservation of what remains is vital as today only 2% of the UK's land mass is ancient woodland, so it is very special indeed and increasingly rare.

Loss of ancient woodland and net loss of woods and trees in general is important because woodland delivers a huge range of ecosystem services (the benefits the natural environment provides to society) including carbon storage, recreation timber and a contribution to water regulation.

Wivelsfield is a watershed between the rivers Adur and Ouse: trees decrease the rate at which rainfall reaches the ground and runs off into watercourses and drains. In both urban and rural areas this allows more time for natural and man made drainage systems to take water away, reducing the likelihood or severity of rivers flooding or surface water inundating homes. Woodland can also create a sponge affect, meaning that water can infiltrates into the soil and then be stored there.

The lack of soil disturbance and recycling of leaves and other dead material from trees in woodland leads to an increase in soil organic matter and development of soil structure with natural channels and pores. Woods act as filters, removing damaging pollutants from rivers that run through them. Correctly situated trees can also stabilise river banks. This would protect against erosion and further pollution.



The current areas of ancient woodland in Wivelsfield Parish. Research by Wivelsfield History Study Group indicates that this is less than 50% of the woodland in the parish c.1600.

WILDLIFE CORRIDORS:

Corridors and stepping stones are needed to allow wildlife to move through the countryside and should be protected, extended and enhanced otherwise isolation of species in a single habitat will occur, which often results in populations dying out. Other corridors are, or may be created by the extension of, hedgerow and woodland edge habitat across holdings as demonstrated in such projects as the West Weald Landscape Project.

THE RURAL ECONOMY:

The rural landscape of agricultural land and woodland has been managed by man for centuries. Continued active farming and local food production should be supported and high standards of husbandry and land stewardship encouraged, in order to make efficient use of natural resources and encourage sustainable production and consumption by lowering food miles.

Residents like to see active farming and it provides views, green spaces and a good range of other habitat.

Recommendations

WILDLIFE CORRIDORS:

Preserve the existing wildlife corridors and connect holdings, other open/green space and ancient woodland by further corridors. Two-thirds of those responding (69.5%) to the recent Housing Survey indicated that the protection and enhancement of local wildlife and diversity in the Parish is very important (AiRS Report). The NP, through the planning system, should seek to preserve, restore and safeguard water quality and stream-side habitat especially in tributaries flowing from existing built-up areas as well as in any new developments.

TREES AND LANDSCAPE:

The Independent Panel on Forestry recommends integrating tree and woodland strategies into local and neighbourhood plans, therefore it would be desirable for the Wivelsfield Neighbourhood Plan to include a policy that development that damages, or results in the loss of ancient trees or trees of good arboricultural and amenity value, will not normally be permitted.

Proposals should be designed to retain ancient trees or trees of arboricultural and amenity value. Proposals should be accompanied by a tree survey that establishes the health and longevity of any affected trees.

The policy should also protect features of nature conservation and/or amenity importance on the site, for example trees, woodlands, hedgerows, soils, streams, stream corridors, springs, ditches or ponds, from damage, destruction and deterioration in quality

Any development that would result in the loss of, or the deterioration in the quality of an important natural feature(s), including protected trees and hedgerows will not normally be permitted. In exceptional circumstances, where the

benefit of development is considered to outweigh the benefit of preserving natural features, development will be permitted subject to adequate compensatory provision being made. The retention of trees, hedgerows and other natural features in situ will always be preferable. Where the loss of such features is unavoidable, replacement provision should be of a commensurate value to that which is lost.

RURAL/BUILT-UP AREA BOUNDARIES:

Retain the much-valued rural character of the villages by protecting the existing, precious and pressurized, rural/built-up area boundaries. Critical points are:

- protect the surrounding countryside and specifically ancient woodland
- preservation & management of ancient hedgerows and hedgebanks
- ensure SUDs use appropriate planting and avoid invasive non native plants.

All new development should produce a green infrastructure plan to show how the development can improve green-spaces and corridors for people and nature, in the context of the surrounding landscape.

The Historic Built Environment

RECREATION AREAS AND ACCESS TO THESE:

AiRS Rural Place Profile recommendations for a sustainable community include: Enabling a lifestyle that minimises negative environmental impact and enhances positive impacts (e.g. by creating opportunities for walking and cycling, and reducing noise pollution and dependence on cars);

Habitation sites exist in Wivelsfield from at least Celtic times. There are currently 28 listings (<http://www.britishlisted-buildings.co.uk/england/east+sussex/wivelsfield>); a substantial number of these are timber-framed, dating from c.1390 onwards. These and other building are listed in [Appendix 1](#).

There are numerous find sites in the parish (East Sussex Historic Environment Record), many associated with the various ancient trackways and drove roads, now footpaths and bridleways, running through the parish. These finds are accelerating, with building development and more sophisticated archæological investigation methods, and increasingly indicate the rich palimpsest of Wivelsfield's past that should be recorded and preserved for the future.

Recommendations

HISTORIC FEATURES

- That new developments should not impinge detrimentally on the curtilage of historic buildings.
- The conservation area in Church Lane to be enlarged
- Historic landscape features such as moats, boundary ditches, ancient hedgebanks, trackways and drove roads, etc. should be retained and safeguarded for the benefit of humans and wildlife.

RECREATION:

- Create/provide better healthy activity facilities for children aged between 4-13 especially in Wivelsfield West
- Preserve and maintain the recreation ground and children's play area.
Nation Playing Fields Association's (now Fields in Trust) Six Acre Standard for playing space advocates six acres (2.4ha) per 1000 people comprising 1.6ha for outdoor sport and 0.8ha for children's play.

FOOTPATHS:

- Improve the rural footpath network + upgrade stiles to make all dog-friendly.
- Review footpath signage, stiles and gates regularly.
- Publicise Wivelsfield History Study Group local footpath guide, which includes details of ancient woodlands, meadows and historical sites – on www.wivelsfield.net
- Encourage a programme of local, guided walks including 'Healthy Walks' publicised on www.wivelsfield.net

CYCLING:

- The provision of safe cycling routes within and between the villages will be a major project supporting cycling for families and children which will require appropriate funding. It should be a strategic objective at the relevant local authority level. Investigate possible funding through Sustrans and British Cycling.
- Produce and promote information leaflets about these cycle routes. Publicise on www.wivelsfield.net

BRIDLEWAYS AND FOOTPATHS:

- Work with bridleway association to ensure that routes are well maintained and signed.
 - Ensure information about bridleways is available on web site.
 - Protect footpaths and minimise conflict between users.
 - Spread awareness and education on the “country code” as all access to the countryside is sensitive to both environment and rural livelihoods.
- For example, the need to control dogs near livestock, not to disturb nesting birds, not to deviate from marked footpaths especially across agricultural land - all of which could be reinforced with robustly phrased signage.

PUBLIC GREEN SPACE and PRIVATE GARDENS:

- Protect the amount, amenity and visual attractiveness of public green space and private gardens within the villages’ built-up areas and enhance the habitat for wildlife.
- There should be no net loss of green space; private gardens should not be built upon, except for reasonable extensions and garden buildings.
- Such extensions should preferably be constructed to include greater use of green roofs and permeable surfaces.
- Awareness should be spread on how to increase the attractiveness of this habitat to wildlife.

Recent research, that has demonstrated the importance of gardens for wildlife, has also shown that earlier, demanding and prescriptive, advice is not necessary and guidance can be simple and straightforward

NEW HOUSING

The greatest number of those responding (38.4%) to the recent Housing Survey indicated that NP should treat reduction in the Parish carbon footprint as very important and AiRS Rural Place Profile recommendations for a sustainable community include:

- Actively seek to minimise climate change, including through energy efficiency and the use of renewables;
- Protect the environment, by minimising pollution on land, in water and in the air
- Create cleaner, safer and greener neighbourhoods

Opportunities that should therefore be considered are:

Protecting wildlife:

- Design new developments, in accordance with up-to-date good practice, to be permeable to wild-life. Developers’ contributions from the Plan area should finance improvements to the amenity and biodiversity of the Plan landscape.
- Create multi-functional habitat on buildings (roofs, terraces, façades, etc.) to provide high quality wildlife habitat equal in quality and function to local priority habitats
- Include bat boxes or lofts and bird boxes on all housing, to reflect the species within the area. Priority bird species are: barn owls, house martins, house sparrows, starlings, swallows and swifts
- Include provision of hedgerow habitat on at least one side of gardens
- Enhance surface area drainage for biodiversity by incorporating ditch habitat and pond networks
- Make garden to garden access easy for hedgehogs.
- More recreation grounds in and around the Parish (especially in Wivelsfield West) with the addition of adventure playgrounds.

Minimizing Environmental Impact and Carbon Footprint:

- Small scale developments where possible – 4/5 houses.
- Incorporation of maximum standards of insulation to minimise power requirements.
- Eco housing should be a priority to allow for a true low carbon footprint standard for future developments.
- All new developments to demonstrate that existing provision of energy supply and drainage are adequate prior to granting of any approval thus avoiding patching up the networks after the developments have been completed.
- Incorporation of “grey” water recycling technology in all new housing in order to alleviate the pressure on the sewage system and water supply.
- Developments to be tied to provision of renewed and/or upgraded sewage capacity
- Ensure that a best practice level of habitat and biodiversity investigation is undertaken in preparing development plans, that all species records are lodged with the SxBRC and all findings disclosed in planning applications.

- It is recognised that increased traffic will impact on the quality of the parish environment both to humans and animals; increasing road kill of birds and larger mammals witnesses to this. Any increase in traffic fumes/ air pollution will impact of health of humans and the environment.
- In accordance with paragraph 175 of the NPPF, a meaningful proportion of the funds raised from developers in our neighbourhood should be applied to the neighbourhood. This should include improvements to green space for both people and wildlife. The money should be spent promptly and wisely.

Conclusion

The policy recommendations of our Focus Group define what, based upon up-to-date good practice guidance, is sustainable for the Parishes' living landscape.

The Environment and Countryside Focus Group was made up off one Parish Councillor (Lead/Chair), two Steering Group members and two co-opted members. This report has been produced by three of them.

LIST OF DOCUMENTS, BODIES, GROUPS, INDIVIDUALS ETC. CONSULTED:

- Opinions from those that attended APM on 13th March, Open Day on 7th June.
- Housing Survey.
- Children from Wivelsfield Primary School, Chailey Secondary School and youth groups.

Access to a considerable body of evidence, amounting to many hundreds of pages, and including:

- Sussex Biodiversity Centre Report for Wivelsfield Parish and habitat research.
- East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment.
- Sussex Wildlife Trust – Living Landscapes.
- Landscape-scale Conservation for Butterflies And Moths Report from Butterfly Conservation.
- Natural England and the Countryside Council for Wales:

Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) recommend:

- No person should live more than 300m from their nearest area of natural greenspace of at least 2ha in size.
- At least one accessible 20ha site within 2km of home.
- One accessible 100ha site within 5km of home.
- One accessible 500ha site within 10km of home | provision of at least 1ha of Local Nature Reserve per 1,000 people

The Woodland Trust's Woodland Access Standard aspires:

- That no person should live more than 500m from at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 2ha in size
- That there should also be at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 20ha within 4km (8km round trip) of people's homes.

OTHER SOURCES

- Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Trust (ARC)
- People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES)
- The Mammal Society
- Badger Trust Sussex
- Sussex Bat Group
- RSPB + local birder expert Audrey Wendy
- Wivelsfield Primary School
- Sussex University vegetation surveys

APPENDIX 1.

Habitation sites with current buildings T-F = timber-framed

Abbots Leigh – Listed Grade II
 Antye - T-F c 1390 rebuild
 Baldings – Listed Grade II
 Bankside Farm – Listed Grade II
 Bethel Chapel – Listed Grade II
 Botches – Listed Grade II
 Clearwaters Farm – Listed Grade II

Cleavewater – Oasthouse (maybe over the border in mid-Sussex)
Fanners - pre-Elizabethan foundations & cellars + later rebuild
Great Ote Hall – Listed Grade II
Jenners – Listed Grade II
Lockstrood – Listed Grade II
Lockstrood Barn - T-F early 1600s
Lunces Celtic habitation site, many rebuilds
Oak Cottages - T-F 1500s
Olde Cottage – Listed Grade II
Old Cottage - T-F (N Common Road) 1500s
Otehall Chapel – Listed Grade II
Pepperhall – Listed Grade II
Rogers – Listed Grade II
Manns – Listed Grade II
Moat House – Listed Grade II
More House – Listed Grade II
Sedgebrook – Listed Grade II
Shoulders - T-F Medieval site
Skinners – Listed Grade II
Strood - T-F Medieval site
School House - T-F (former poor house)
Tapestry/ Wren Cottage – Listed Grade II
Vergers – Listed Grade II
Chimneys/Glebe, – Listed Grade II
Windham/Moonrakers – Listed Grade II
South Colwell - T-F rebuild on 13C site
South Slugwash - T-F 1500s
Studio Cottage gatehouse to Lunces when B2112 was turnpiked
Theobalds – Listed Grade II*
Townings - Victorian rebuild on ancient habitation site
Wheelwrights - T-F 1600s
Whitebreads Farm - recorded 1637
Wivelsfield Hall early 20th century house on or near Celtic site of Berth

Sites

Berth - Celtic site
Hole - medieval
North Hole - medieval, remnants visible in field
Puddledock - remnants visible in field
Toll Gate & Cottage B2112
Windmill west side of Hundred Acre Lane, near Coldharbour
WWII Anti-Aircraft Gun Battery
Village poor house beside B2112 east side of Lunces

