

The Sussex Local Nature Partnership (LNP) has published a Natural Capital Investment Strategy for Sussex, 2019-2024.

One of the purposes of the strategy is to help decision makers become aware of the value of investing in 'natural capital' in Sussex and to highlight the investment priorities as recognised by the Partnership.

What is the Sussex Local Nature Partnership?

The Sussex LNP represents 25 organisations from different sectors, working together to help create the most healthy ecological system possible, in order to protect the environment for the benefit of people and wildlife.

The partnership covers the Counties of East Sussex, West Sussex and the City of Brighton and Hove, both on land and out to the boundary of in-shore waters at 6 nautical miles. Members of the partnership include Local Authorities, Environmental NGOs, Businesses and Statutory bodies. Partners are listed on www.sussexlnp.org.uk

What is Natural Capital?

The Natural Capital Approach builds on our understanding of the natural environment and the ecosystem services that it provides us. The Defra 25 year plan published in 2018 embedded this approach in the UK nature conservation sector.

Natural Capital can be described as the way elements of nature; e.g. woodlands, rivers, soils and seas, offer value to people, society and the economy in various ways. The stocks of natural capital (referred to as natural capital assets) include all ecosystems on land and at sea.

The Sussex Local Nature Partnership recognises above all that nature is in crisis and any reference to the value of nature must always recognise the intrinsic value of nature for its own sake. No financial figure can reflect what biological diversity truly means to our society. However, taking a 'Natural Capital approach' does

recognise value to people through the services and benefits that nature provides us.

This value can be obvious, it includes food, fuel, clean air, clean water, and the opportunity for recreation. Less visible services are flood defences provided by natural vegetation, billions of tonnes of carbon stored by our soils and vegetation and the pollination of crops by insects.

All of these services and benefits have a value to society. Some of the values and benefits can be easily quantified and reflected in the economy (such as the value of timber or food produced from farmland or our inshore waters), but many cannot, and what this means is that their value can be missed out in decision-making processes and economic valuations.

Some of the values of natural capital that have been calculated:

- The value of pollination to UK agriculture is estimated at £440 million per year
- Noise mitigation by vegetation in UK urban areas led to a minimum saving of £15.3 million in associated health costs in 2017
- In 2016, living within 500 metres of green and blue space was estimated to be worth £78 billion to UK homes
- Sussex Ports saw over £27 million of fishing catch in 2018

Why is investment in natural capital important?

Investing in the protection, enhancement and recovery of our natural capital assets is fundamental to reversing the current declines seen in wildlife in Sussex and to preventing the erosion of the services and benefits that nature provides.

But it also provides a positive opportunity to use nature as ‘part of the solution’ to some of the problems facing the environment, society and economy in Sussex such as poor water quality, flood risk, lack of access to natural spaces for health and wellbeing benefit etc.

Investment in our natural capital will increase its resilience in the face of current and future risks, such as increasing development, population pressures and the impacts of climate change such as extreme weather events. A more resilient natural environment will confer greater resilience to our communities and economy in the face of these same challenges.

Investing in our natural capital assets will increase the capacity of nature in Sussex to store carbon, offering a critical tool in society’s response to the climate emergency.

What work has been done?

The Sussex Local Nature Partnership, working with the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre has compiled a register of the Natural Capital assets found in Sussex, such as rivers, streams, lakes, reservoirs, heathland, grassland, woodland, agricultural land, hedgerows, sand dunes, cliffs, seabed habitats etc..

This led to an investigation into the quality, quantity and spatial configuration of these assets and an analysis of whether they were successfully providing the services and benefits expected, or if they were categorised as Sussex Natural Capital Assets “at risk”.

This work was done by working with a suite of Sussex based technical experts. This has enhanced collective understanding of where these natural assets are, what condition they are in, and how this relates to the benefits we get from them.

All of this is being compiled into an ‘Asset Register’ for Sussex.

From this point Sussex technical experts have highlighted where the priorities (both geographically and conceptually) are in investing in Natural Capital, to protect and enhance services and benefits that are vulnerable on behalf of the population of Sussex.

This was done for seven priority services and benefits using the best available evidence and advice.

What benefits does the Sussex Natural Capital Investment Strategy bring?

The Investment Strategy places a commitment to biodiversity and the recovery of nature at the heart of the application of the natural capital approach in Sussex.

It identifies how Sussex LNP partners can work together to protect and enhance the natural assets of Sussex, so that these continue to provide multiple benefits for people into the future.

It ensures that all partners of the Sussex Local Nature Partnership are consistent in their understanding of what the priorities are for investment in Nature in Sussex.

It seeks to compliment and coordinate (rather than replace) the range of national and local policies and projects that are already in place in Sussex that use the natural capital approach. It also seeks to bring local relevance to national policies.

The Investment Strategy provides a framework for dialogue with external stakeholders who wish to invest in nature’s recovery and the services and benefits that are delivered by healthy Sussex ecosystems.

Key elements of the strategy

Overarching principle: commitment to biodiversity within the natural capital approach

1. Protection and enhancement of natural capital assets – through:
 - a. Protection and enhancement of natural capital assets
 - b. Strategic enhancement of natural capital assets through the creation of a 'nature recovery network'
2. Investment in natural capital to deliver specific benefits and services:
 - a. *Sufficient water supply*
 - b. *A clean water environment*
 - c. *Reduced flood risk*
 - d. *Accessible nature*
 - e. *Healthy and productive inshore waters*
 - f. *Improved climate regulation through carbon storage and sequestration*

The strategy identifies 'natural capital investment areas' for each of the above.
3. Making it happen: the steps needed to take the natural capital approach forward within Sussex through the work of the LNP

In Summary the strategy seeks to:

- Gain a better understanding of the natural capital of Sussex, where it is located and what benefits it provides to the economy of the area, using the best data available.
- Assess how best to focus effort, resources and funds to look after natural capital assets for the benefit of nature and people.
- Identify opportunities to use a natural capital approach to enhance services and benefits, such as clean water, accessible nature, carbon storage, flood risk reduction and healthy/productive inshore waters.
- Provide guidance on the steps needed to take this strategy forward into action.

Where to go for further information

The strategy document can be downloaded from the LNP website at www.sussexlnp.org.uk. A summary of the asset register will also be published on this site once complete. For any other information please contact info@sussexlnp.org.uk.