



Weald to Waves

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a wildlife corridor?

A wildlife corridor connects pockets of nature across fragmented landscapes, acting as a link allowing wildlife to move freely and safely from one habitat to another. To thrive, nature needs to be connected – in our British landscape, cut up by infrastructure, roads, towns and intensive land use we need nature corridors to try and stem the collapse of biodiversity. A corridor can be as small as a hedgerow or a roadside verge and as big as a rewilding project.

How big is this proposed corridor?

Buffered by regenerative and wildlife-friendly food production we aim to create 10,000 hectares of contiguous space for wildlife, with rich, biodiverse habitats along the route, connecting them as much as possible so that animals can travel through the landscape easily.

Why is it called Weald to Waves?

The route of the proposed corridor would run from Ashdown Forest in the High Weald to the Sussex coast where there are significant efforts being made to restore the kelp forests on the sea floor, connecting the Weald and the waves.

Why do we need a corridor?

Britain is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. Our wildlife is under immense pressure from the loss of habitat and habitat fragmentation. We urgently need to reverse the damage done. While there have been decades of tireless conservation and on farm conservation wildlife cannot thrive in fragments. We need something cohesive and coordinated to connect the dots so this work can come together at a landscape level, at which point ecosystems can truly recover.

Is this all about rewilding?

No. Rewilding is a method of creating new habitats at scale using natural processes to drive the system, so that our landscape and our wildlife can recover. Weald to Waves will use rewilding as just one component of many. Other forms of nature restoration will be key – managed landscapes, on farm conservation, hedgerow management, wildflower meadows, woodland management to name a few. If successful, this corridor will create space for nature to thrive and move but it will also cross and incorporate complex human landscapes including people and food production. In this way, it will call for a mosaic of approaches for delivery, alongside rewilding we will use regenerative farming, river restoration and traditional conservation to bring the corridor to life.

How will this affect farming?

Food production is a fundamental need and places an inescapable demand on our landscapes. In this time of heightened concern over food security we will work with farmers and farmer clusters to ensure that our landscape continues to produce food but does so with nature in mind, finding ways to build connectivity for nature through and on farms from core habitat to core habitat. The corridor is not intending to take large swathes of viable land out of food production but make use of unproductive and marginal land. By investing in soil health and thriving pollinator populations, we will help to protect the conditions we need for food production now and in the future.

Is this a priority when we have the rising cost of living and threat of food insecurity?

Our food and fuel systems are vulnerable to shocks. A 'just in time' supply chain that ensures maximum efficiency in the rate that our food is processed and delivered to us means that there is very little slack to absorb any unexpected delays or shortages. War and conflict, economic instability and trade disputes will all shake these complex systems, and many around the world are feeling the pain of that at the moment. Environmental crises can be catastrophic for food production, and these can be acute, such as drought, flooding, and extreme weather or tectonic events, or chronic and far less visible, such as the rapid decline in our pollinators, water and air pollution and the degradation of our soils. While we tackle the acute pain points, this chronic, invisible damage continues and if we don't make it a priority to tackle this now then we will miss crucial windows of opportunity to reverse it and protect future food supplies and clean water.

Is this only about landowners?

Landowners, land managers and farmers will play a critical role in this project, but it will only come about through significant community collaboration. This will call on the knowledge and capability of our schools, place of worship, community groups, businesses and local government. Weald to Waves is a citizen project and will engage a diversity of partners across the landscape.

Will the corridor be accessible to people?

The Sussex countryside is criss-crossed with footpaths, permissive paths and bridleways. Our rivers and seas are enjoyed by kayakers, swimmers and anglers. The corridor will incorporate many of these public accessible points and potentially create new opportunities for engaging with wildlife. We hope to harness citizen science and draw on the public imagination to shape, monitor and celebrate the corridor.

Will the map follow this set route?

The route of the map is far from set and will no doubt change many times as new opportunities and collaborations emerge. The current depicted route is aspirational and shows an illustration of what a connected landscape could look like.

Will it go into other areas of Sussex?

Since we launched the concept last year, we have heard from many people and groups who are interested in either being part of the corridor or creating corridors in their areas. We are intending to focus first on the proposed route and then find ways to connect with other areas of nature recovery across the region. A big part of the project will be sharing knowledge, learning and resources with others who are interested in starting similar projects.

Will there be any species reintroduced into the corridor?

We've seen from other successful nature recovery work that a healthy landscape will encourage the return of species by providing the conditions needed for them to survive and thrive. There may be opportunities to support the reintroduction of both fauna and flora that have been lost from our landscapes or to boost numbers of those in dangerous decline.

How's this being paid for?

We have a group of founding members who have supported the early work to design and communicate the vision of the corridor. We will now be seeking funders who can back the next stage of development. This next wave of funding could come from government, philanthropic or appropriate corporate sponsorship. In the near future, we hope to support land managers and farmers to connect with emerging land management schemes and markets around carbon and biodiversity that acknowledge and fund stewardship of these environmental assets and services. The cost of the corridor is difficult to assess at this early stage, but we will be using this scoping and design period to establish the resources needed. We are aiming to raise at least £1 million to invest in an initial two-year development phase which will secure land management agreements and provide both the ecological and public engagement baseline studies necessary to plan and monitor the work.

Will the corridor be contiguous?

The corridor needs to be coherent and connected but that connection does not necessarily need to be contiguous throughout for it to be considered a successful corridor. There also is a role for 'stepping stones' that are areas of rich habitat that are close enough to enable birds and insects, for example, to travel between them and can be considered a connected habitat.

What about the major roads and railway lines how are you cross them?

The viability of the corridor could be threatened by significant barriers, such as existing or proposed infrastructure or development that prevent key species from moving beyond them. Therefore, we may have a need for green bridges or tunnels that can override these barriers and help connect the landscape. Interestingly where roads and railways often provide a block for wildlife – they can also form a perpendicular corridor along their verges. Roadside verges, scrublands and woodlands are often rich in life, its crossing the road that can be the issue for species.

Will we need to build bridges?

It's been estimated that as many as 14,649 animals die on Britain's roads each year, with data hard to report as only a tiny percentage are documented. Incidentally, July is thought to be the deadliest month. Between 42,000 and 74,000 deer are involved in collisions each year on roads in the UK which are thought to lead to more than 450 human injuries, and up to 20 fatalities. The corridors are not only about crossing roads, but also passing through and adjacent to sustainable housing and farmland but we will need to consider the best way to tie landscapes over busy road and rail infrastructure in Sussex.

Is there a precedent for this kind of green infrastructure?

The UK currently has a small number of green bridges, including one that crosses the A21 at Scotney Castle in Kent in the High Weald Area of Natural Beauty (AONB). The Weald to Waves will continue to put the south-east in a position of leadership in this space and create a new vision of how people can exist within nature-rich landscapes. Europe is far ahead of us! France has over 100 green 'écoponts', with many more being planned. Netherlands has at least 47 'ecoducts' including one that hosts ponds and wetlands over road and rail infrastructure. A Natural England review identified a range of between £1.1 to £10 million however, one conversion of a 'grey bridge' to green bridge was achieved for £366,000. It is helpful to consider that the cost of damage to vehicles through deer collisions alone is estimated to be at least £11 million a year.

How will the corridor be governed and managed?

The project will be administered through the new Knepp Wildland Foundation, which sits at the heart of the proposed route and will provide management support to ensure the corridor is well-

planned. One of the first roles will be to explore the most appropriate communication and decision-making structure for the diverse range of stakeholders involved in the project. With pioneering community-led initiatives such as this, there are many brilliant options to ensure everyone's voice is heard, decisions are made efficiently, and the work is carried out with integrity and transparency.

Is this the first in the country?

We have always had wildlife corridors across the country; hedgerows, field margins, wetlands and woodland are all corridors and help wildlife to move around our landscape. However, over the years these crucial links have been severed by the removal or narrowing of hedgerows, loss of our woodlands and forests, draining of our wetlands and farming right up to our field margins. We have the skeleton of corridors all around us that we can restore through careful work. Weald to Waves is part of a new era of organised landscape-scale nature recovery and in its ambition to cross one of the most populated and built-up areas of the country, it is indeed unprecedented. We hope it will run parallel to many other community and citizen-led corridors around the country, which will eventually combine into genuine and sustainable national landscape recovery.

Could this spread invasive species?

A corridor helps wildlife to move and therefore there always is a possibility that this could enable competitors, non-native species and pathogens to move more easily too. However, we know from the work at Knepp and other places where nature is recovering at scale at its own pace that equilibrium is quickly established and that there are ample and often ancient defences held within ecosystems that can withstand and address natural threats. This corridor will also have the benefit of being designed, managed and monitored by landscape leads who bring both farming and ecology specialism, which can help to mitigate any risks and ensure this is a thriving environment for nature to recover. What we are more likely to find is that species, including much-loved and swiftly declining creatures that were once part of our regional landscape, like nightingales, turtle doves, dormice, and hedgehogs, will find their way back to our gardens, farms, parkland and we will have the joy of seeing now-rare sightings of grey seals coastlines along the corridor.

Is this the right time to do this?

We have never had more clarity over the crisis we face as the natural systems that we survive on plunge further into a state of emergency. For the first time, government funding is being put into nature recovery and land management policy is starting to align through the new Environmental Land Management Scheme. Developers are being mandated by law to meet biodiversity net gain goals and nature recovery is now underpinned by new laws that sit within the Environment Bill. Furthermore, Local Nature Recovery Strategies have brought in new motivations for landowners to set up voluntary conservation covenants that can make this work viable and visible. It is a very exciting moment, but it is also fragile. We need clear templates for ambitious landscape-scale recovery programmes that cross not just roads but social and industry divides and restore connectivity between both nature and communities.

Will the corridor influence water quality and flood defence in the area?

Sussex has many low-lying areas that are prone to flooding. Many of these communities have been badly affected in recent years and, nationally, flood damage is thought to cost us around £1.3 billion each year. Flood risk is made worse by removing natural defences such as river meanders, wetlands and woodlands that help to slow flow and hold water upstream. The Weald to Waves corridor would incorporate at least two major river restoration projects, one on the Adur and another on the Arun, with land managers, farmers and partners working together to return these waterways to a healthy state and reduce both the flood risk and the levels of pollutants in our rivers and, in turn, our seas.

What happens when the corridor reaches the sea?

Just like our ecosystems, the corridor does not end at the coast. The seas around Sussex were once rich in wildlife, with Kelp forests once stretching 40 kilometres, providing critical shelter, feeding and nursery grounds for marine life and creating one of the most productive and biodiverse environments on the planet. Kelp also has the potential to store carbon, improve water quality and reduce coastal erosion by absorbing the power of waves. Since the 1980s, however, over 96 per cent of it has been destroyed. To reverse this decline, trawling has been prohibited in over 300 square kilometres of sea bed, and the Sussex Bay initiative, driven by the Sussex Wildlife Trust, is restoring these missing underwater forests, and returning biodiversity to our seas and shores. The corridor will connect both marine, riparian and terrestrial efforts.

How we know it's a success and how will it be monitored?

The corridor will be a wonderful place to witness nature recovery in action. We have brilliant research and ecology teams in Sussex who will provide ample resources and specialism to bring this work to light. We also hope to work with a range of partners, including education institutions, heritage groups, youth and community networks to harness the power of citizen science and reporting in order to track success and capture learning. This learning will be made publicly available so that the corridor can influence other local programmes as well as contribute to national policy.

I want to get involved how can I do that?

Whether you are in government or a gardening, a farmer or a funder there is a need for you! We are just starting to map the rich resources and creative capacity that lies within and around the corridor, in our counties and through our wider regional and national partnerships. We hope to make contact with farmers, landowners and managers across Sussex who are interested in hearing more about the options being explored within the corridor. We are very keen to partner with academic and research networks who can support us in planning and monitoring and need strong press networks to get the word out. So much of the conservation successes to date have hinged on the incredible power of volunteers and the corridor is already benefiting from the generosity of people's valuable time. We need storytellers, designers, and audio-visual artists to help us document and share the work. We particularly need young people, including students and young farmers to guide and shape this work. Whatever your skillset or mindset, do get in touch for a further discussion. You might end up being one of our most critical links!

To find out more about how to get involved, contact:

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