



Wilder Ouse



Annual Report 2025 - 2026





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2025 - 2026 in figures



Wilder Ouse

Deliverables	This Year	Three Year Total
Events	5	34
Hedging (m)	595m	1,648m
Schools engaged	3	9
Trees planted	3,000	11,772
Leaky dams	30 (14 maintained)	210
Pond creation/restoration	4	25
Scrapes	4	18
Pocket ponds	3	14
Increase in natural (flood) water storage from NFM methods NOTE: does not include repeat floods/rain events	252,000L	679,000L
Likely minimum increase in natural flood storage (assuming 30 high rainfall events per annum)	5,020,000L	26,370,000L

2025 - 2026 in figures

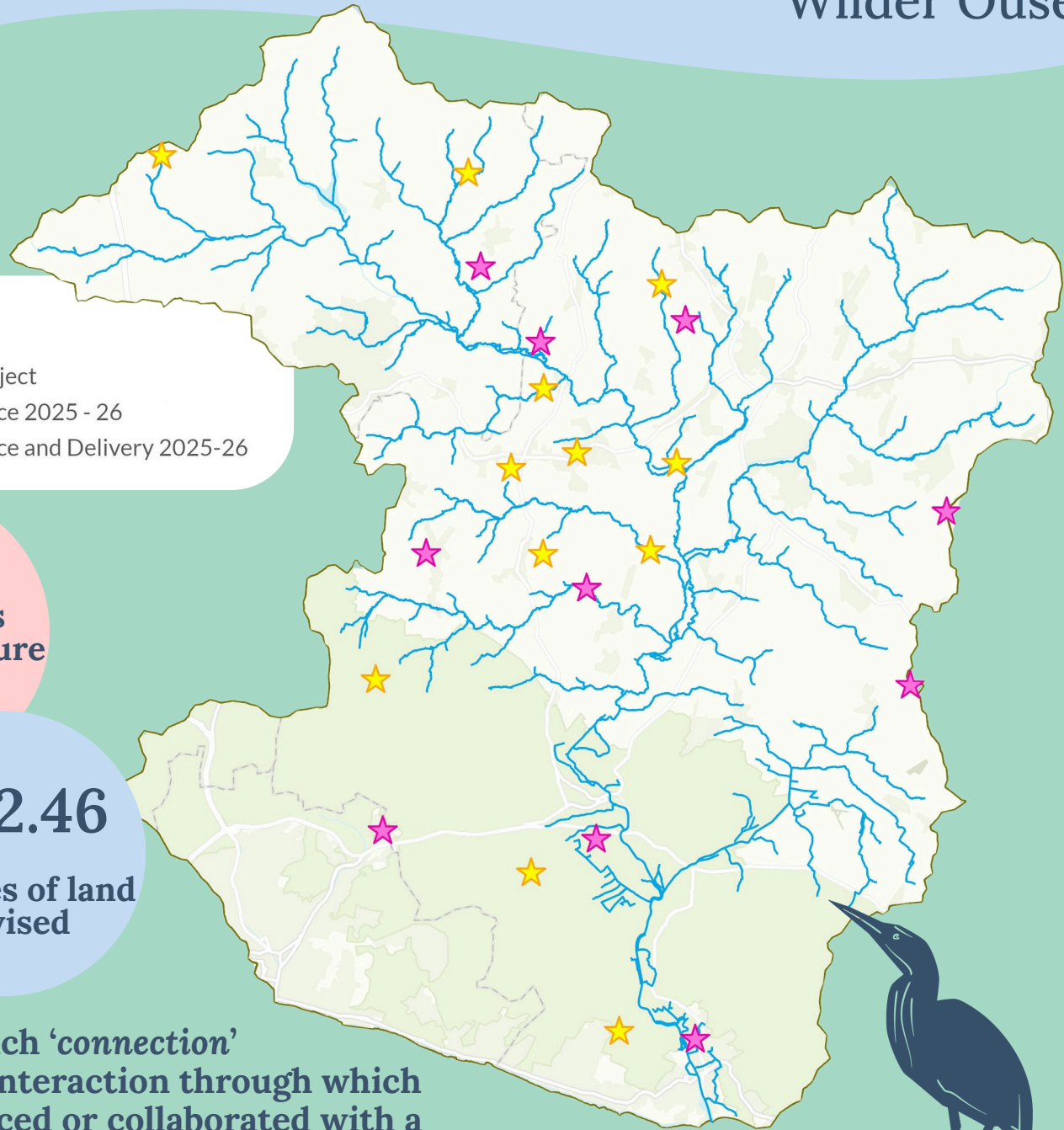
Landowner Engagement



Wilder Ouse

Legend

- River Ouse
- ▣ Wilder Ouse Project
- ★ Landowner Advice 2025 - 26
- ★ Landowner Advice and Delivery 2025-26



13

Landowners
delivering nature
recovery

1032.46

Hectares of land
advised

Each 'connection'
is a discrete interaction through which
we've influenced or collaborated with a
project stakeholder.



26

Landowners
advised

New
42.3%

Existing
57.7%

64

Landowner
connections

New
32.8%

Existing
67.2%



Wetland Habitat Improvement

4

ponds created
or restored

30

leaky dams
created

14

leaky dams
maintained

4

scrapes
created

395m

of ditches
diversified

2025 - 2026 in figures



Wilder Ouse

Flood
water
storage
estimates

Ponds

new
270,000
litres of immediate
water storage

restored
170,000
litres of immediate
water storage

Scrapes

80,000
litres of immediate
water storage

2,320,000
litres of storage
per annum*

Leaky
Dams

90,000
litres of immediate
storage during
heavy rainfall

2,700,000
litres of storage
per annum*

Woodland

74,922
litres of water
storage

Hedgerows

8,087
litres of water
storage

*based on 2025 - 2026 rainfall data (Department of
Environment Food & Rural Affairs)



Trees and Natural Regeneration



3,000

trees planted
in total

of which...

595m of hedgerow planted

= 2.37 Ha of woodland



25
Rare
Black
Poplars
planted



0.25 Ha
woodland
created

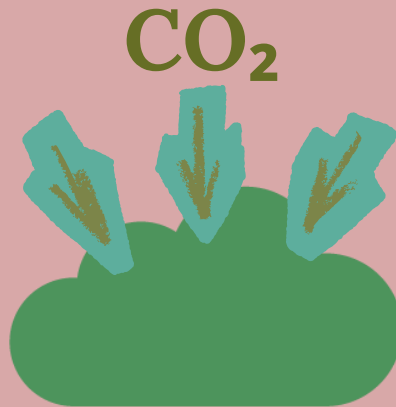


6.3 Ha
allocated to
natural scrub
regeneration



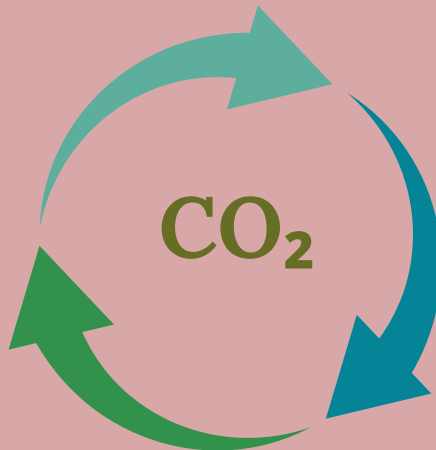
Carbon storage estimates

0.4165
tonnes of
Carbon*
= 416.5kg of CO₂



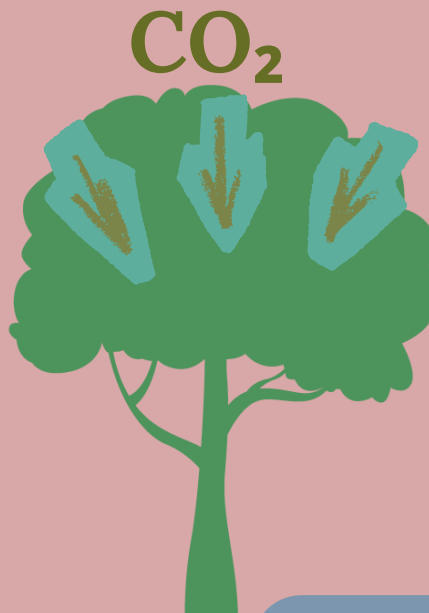
through our
hedgerow
planting

0.3528
tonnes of
Carbon*
= 352.8 kg of CO₂



through land
assigned to
natural scrub
regeneration

0.0813
tonnes of
Carbon*
= 81.34kg of CO₂



through
woodland
planting



In Kind Funding

Volunteer task force

14
volunteer
work parties

3
local school
work parties



Volunteer contributions

£15,000+
value of
volunteer
time

412
hours of
volunteering

Landowner contributions at least...



£6,000



100hrs

External partner contributions at least...



£23,000



120hrs

Sussex Wildlife Trust in kind contributions at least...



£22,000



600hrs

Match Funding brought in to the project

£19,750

match funding from
other grants and
partners

2025 - 2026 in figures



Wilder Ouse

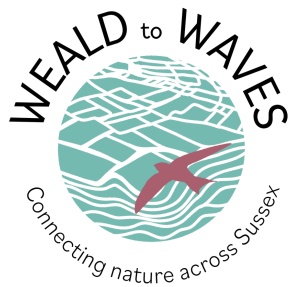
Collaborative working



Lewes District Council



Wealden
District Council



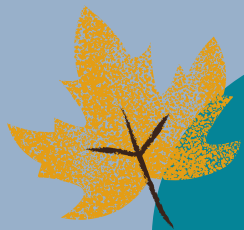
South Downs
National Park Authority

10
of our 14 work
parties were
collaborations



THE GREEN BRITAIN
FOUNDATION

Workshops and training



2
Wilder
Woodland
Workshops

1
leaky dam
workshop

17
people
#trained
in leaky dams

4
youth leaky dam
sessions with
64
students

Talks and Events

1
invasive species
removal day
(on a local wildlife site)

1
community
talk

5
community
events





Designated sites:

5 Local Wildlife Sites
positively advised

1 Site of Special
Scientific Interest
enhanced

2025 - 2026 in figures



Wilder Ouse

Social Media:



15,800 views

Followers: +48%

548 interactions
(likes and comments)

Profile visits: +128%

3.8k views on collaboration video
with Eco Talk



YouTube



1,240 views

Followers: +6.2%

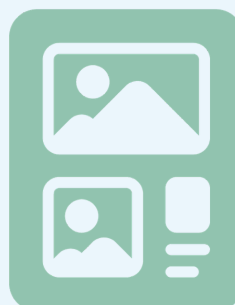
400+ interactions
(likes and comments)

Profile visits: +204%

Web pages:



928 views



2 blogs

325 user visits

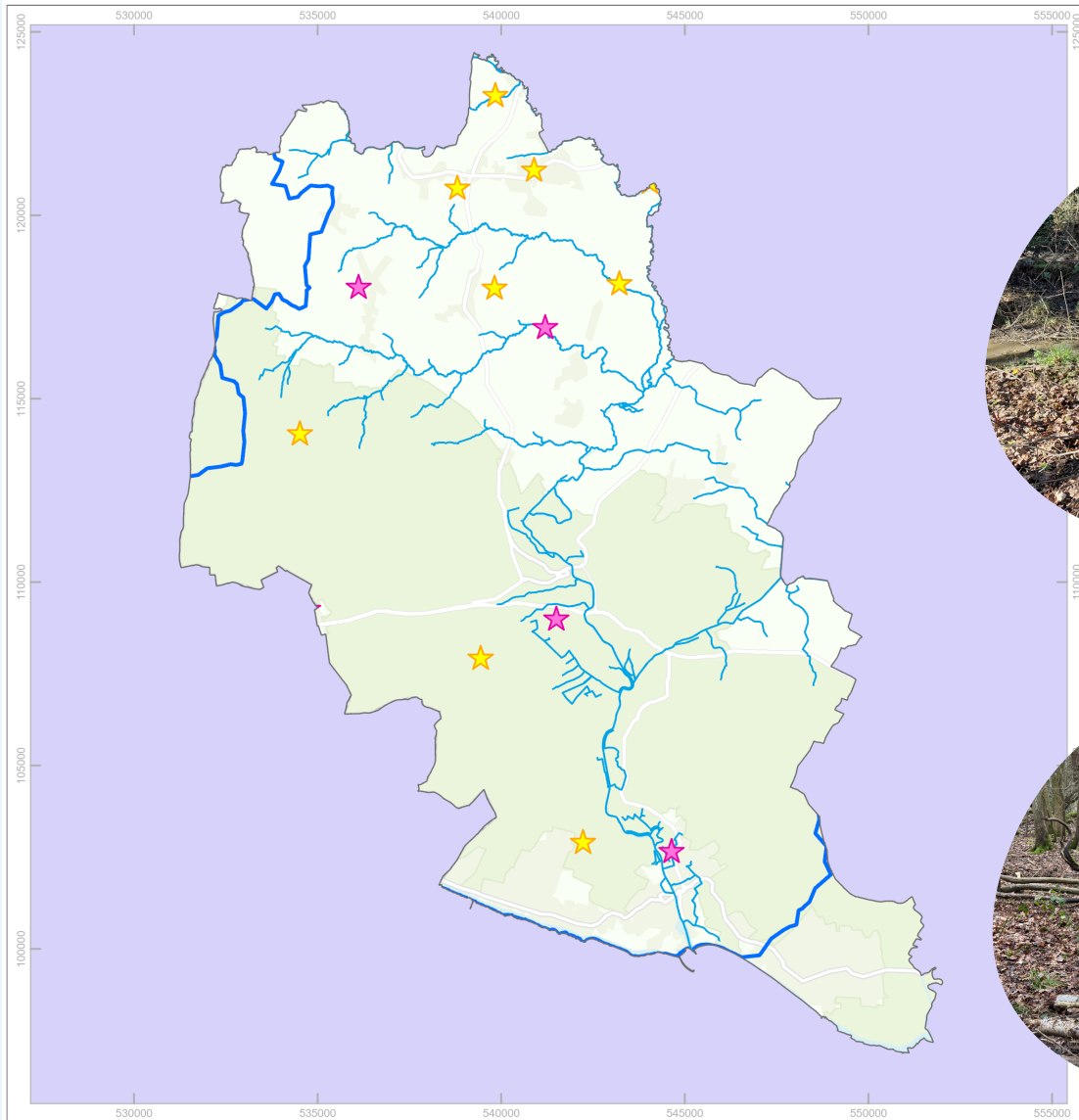


2025 - 2026 in figures



Wilder Ouse

Lewes District Council Engagement and Delivery:



LDC Sites: Reedens Meadow

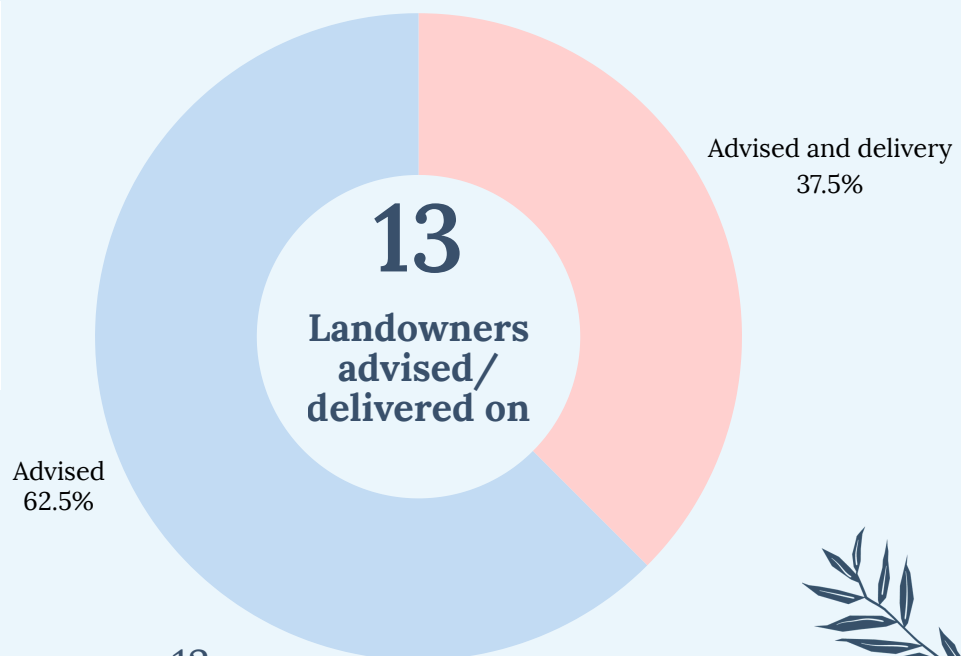


Markstakes Common



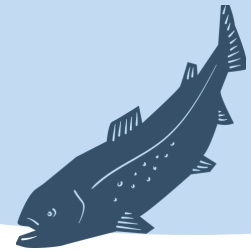
Legend

- ★ Landowner Advice and Delivery 2025-26
- ★ Landowner Advice 2025 - 26
- River Ouse
- Wilder Ouse Project
- Lewes District mask





Wilder Ouse Introduction



Wilder Ouse is a partnership project supported by Lewes District Council and managed by Sussex Wildlife Trust, with contributions from Wealden District Council and others.

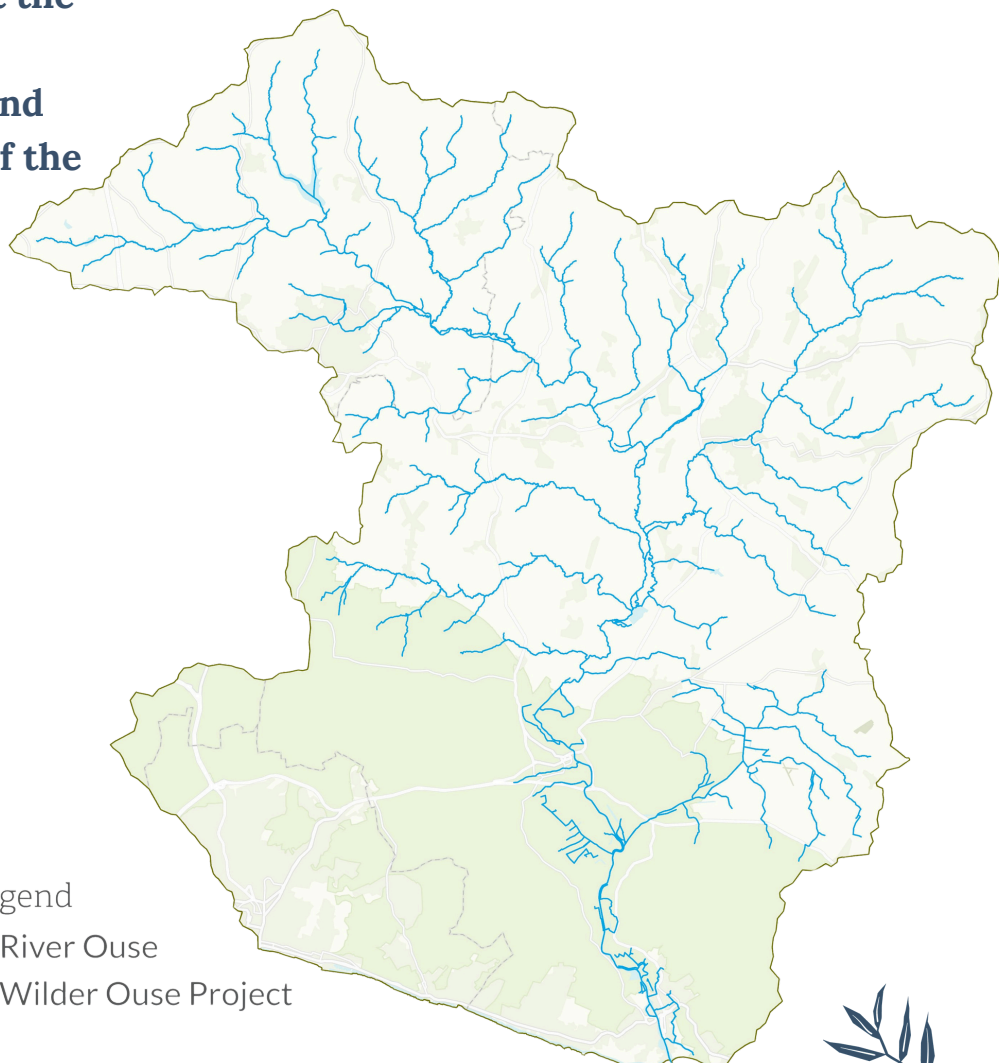
We work across the Ouse catchment to help nature recover, to restore natural processes, and to create climate resilience through nature based solutions.

Wilder Ouse works throughout the catchment to support nature recovery at a landscape scale and has evolved from the success of the Sussex Flow Initiative Project.

Project Area:

The River Ouse is the second-largest river system in Sussex, with around 1,200 km of rivers, streams and brooks across a landscape of around 430 km².

Wilder Ouse works throughout the catchment to support nature recovery at a landscape scale



Legend
— River Ouse
□ Wilder Ouse Project

2025 - 2026 in detail

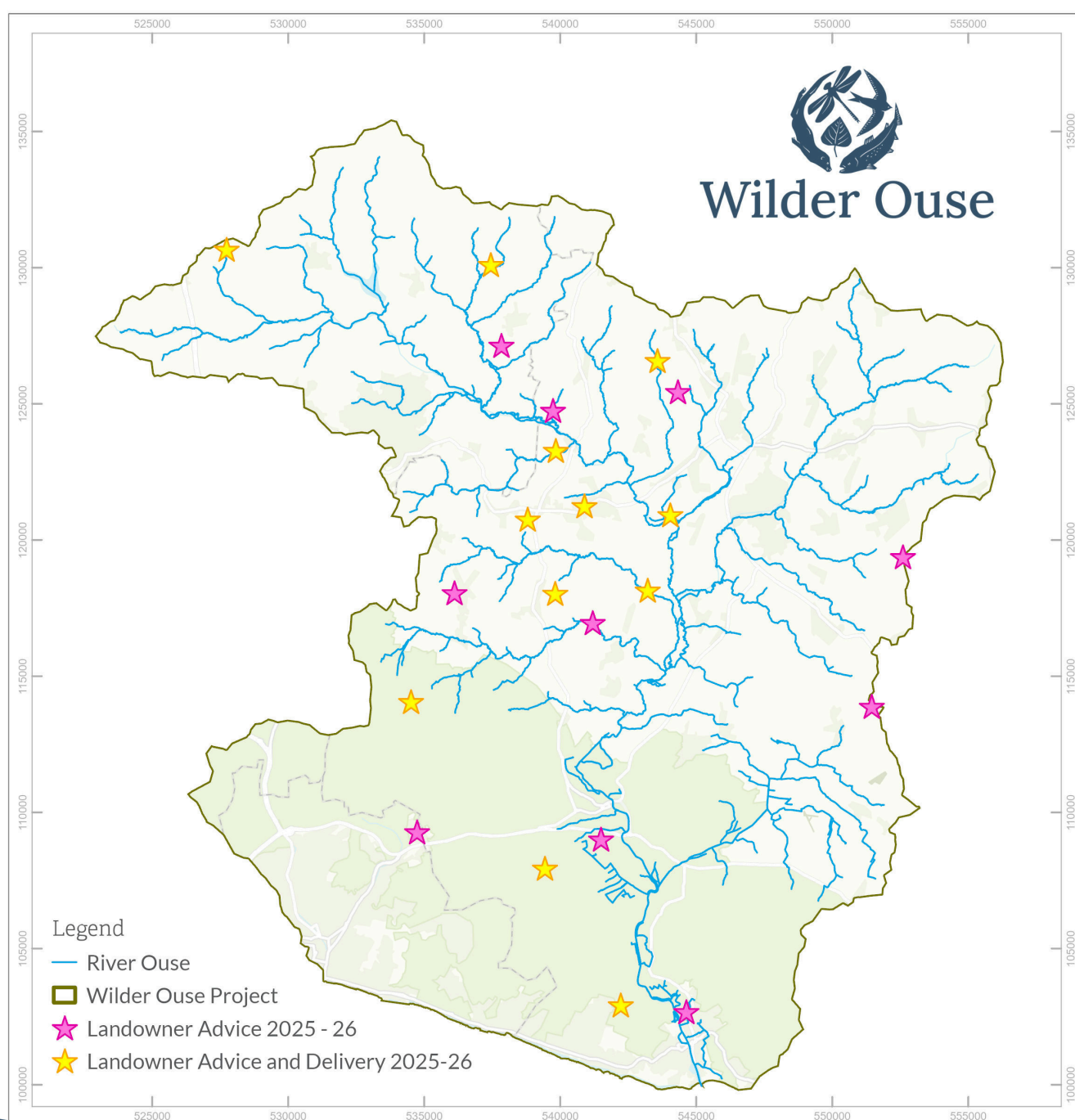
Landscape Resilience



Wilder Ouse

Wilder Ouse helps land managers, community groups and parish councils every year with advice and support. Every year more people approach us to work with them on nature-based solutions, to increase biodiversity and to create a regenerative landscape which supports people and nature.

Although we only had an active project officer for half of this financial year, Wilder Ouse still managed to engage with 26 landowners, of which more than 13 took action for nature on their land.





Chailey Common:

Chailey Common is one of the largest commons in Southern England and a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its heathland and diverse insect populations.

Wilder Ouse has been collaborating with East Sussex County Council who manage the site for many years.

Working with local schools, this year we hosted leaky dam workshops with young people, with Sussex Wildlife Trust's Education Team.

Our 'Behaving like beaver' days support young people's understanding of how they can make a difference, building self esteem and agency in the face of climate change.

Youth Led Nature Recovery



©Harriet Trueman



©Harriet Trueman

One local school visited the Knepp Beaver enclosure with the 100 mile classroom team, before a Wilder Ouse workshop.

This was an inspiring chance for them to see how beavers shape our landscapes and then try to mimick beavers themselves.



Ditch Diversification

395m

of ditches
diversified this
year



©Harriet Trueman



©Harriet Trueman

Ditches are man made drainage features which tend to be straight and deep.

We can enhance ditches for wildlife and to increase their flood storage capacity, by reshaping them.

This year we created 395m of ditch with sloped and wavy edges and sheltered pools, which provides important habitat for wetland wildlife.

Community Farms: Lovebrook



Lovebrook, is a community farm near Lewes who want to improve their land for nature so they can share it with the local community, and create water resilience for their market garden. Wilder Ouse and South Downs National Park worked with Pete the pond to create 2 new ponds, a series of 3 scrapes and some pocket ponds. They were created in March, and we are still waiting for rain to fill them!



Wowo Campsite



©Harriet Trueman

Wowo Campsite want to improve nature on their land by restoring wildlife habitat.



Wilder Ouse volunteers created a series of leaky dams along a flow path that feeds the Pellingford Brook, to help store more water for wildlife.

Wowo have been on their own mission for nature, planting 50,000 trees via a Forestry Commission grant in 2025/26.



Follow the link to hear about how and why we build leaky dams...



©Harriet Trueman

High Beeches



© Elliot Chandler

This was the second year that Wilder Ouse worked with High Beeches. We helped them create a large scrape in the headwaters of the Ouse which provides drought and flood resilience by holding back water.

Scrapes, a natural flood management method:

Scrapes are shallow depressions which are usually dug in river floodplains. They are created by looking at how natural dips in the land interact with water flows and flooding. Natural depressions are deliberately enhanced by enlarging or deepening them. This allows more water to be held seasonally. Scrapes fill and empty frequently which allows more temporary storage of flood water as well as creating seasonal wildlife habitats.



Thorny scrub
acts as a
natural deer
deterrent!



©Harriet Trueman

Wilder Ouse has planted a fantastic 3,000 trees this year with our incredible volunteers. These have created a range of habitats, from woodland copses, to hedges - adding in wiggles to hedges where we can.

Tree Guard removal

A vital job our volunteers have been doing is removing old tree guards. As tree guards age, they become brittle and break into pieces, spreading microplastics into our soils. This is not good for our soil health.

We returned to a hedgerow which was previously planted by Wilder Ouse, to remove tree guards. This gave us a full circle moment! The hedges are flourishing, and removal of tree guards was vital to support tree growth.

300m
of tree guard
removal



©Harriet Trueman

Partnership working and collaboration are very important to Wilder Ouse. When facing the climate and biodiversity crisis, we need to work together more than ever. This year, Wilder Ouse collaborated with 5 other organisations to deliver nature recovery across the Ouse catchment.



©Harriet Trueman



A total of 23 miles of the Weald to Waves corridor runs through the Ouse catchment. We collaborated with Weald to Waves Land Advisor, Tilly Corcoran on nature recovery and climate resilience work.

200m of new hedgerows

4 joint site visits

2 joint volunteer work parties

Hedgerows and Natural Flood Management

Hedgerows regulate the flow of water across and through soils. They act as a barrier for rain run-off, slowing and storing water, as well as being good for nature, climate cooling and carbon storage.



**~£1,000
match
funding**

© Mike Murphy



©Harriet Trueman




LOST WOODS
of the Low Weald and Downs

Wilder Ouse ran a leaky dam workshop in February, at Markstakes Common (Local Wildlife Site) with The Lost Woods of the Low Weald and Downs team.

We built 10 leaky dams and trained 8 volunteers in how to use the best tools, work with the landscape and be adaptable (especially when working with water!).



©Harriet Trueman

21 March 2026

Wilder Ouse and Lost Woods leaky dam workshop

8 people
trained in leaky
dam making
skills!

Watch a time
stamped video of
our day!

Full blog
post here!



10:05 am
conservation talk

© Kieran Patel

Reedens Meadow

In partnership with Lewes District Council (LDC), Wilder Ouse has been delivering Natural Flood Management at Reedens Meadow, in Newick.

Working with the LDC Biodiversity Officer, we developed a plan to create leaky dams along a stretch of woodland stream, to slow down the flow of water.



The volunteers helped us to make leaky dams which also help store water during drought, as well as creating new habitats for wildlife. Frogs and newts may use these dams as hibernaculum in winter.

Whats next at Reedens?

We plan to hand dig a pond on the reserve, continuing to increase water storage while creating new habitats for wildlife.



Hear from Wilder Ouse Officer Harriet Trueman and Sussex Wildlife Trust Trustee Mark Mallalieu talking to Chris Packham about monitoring and restoration at Bowyer's Wood near Uckfield.

Wilder Ouse has been working with the Green Britian Foundation in their journey of rewilding areas along the River Ouse.

Wilder Ouse has helped them to understand the way water moves across their land so that they can rewild it more effectively.

We delivered a volunteer work party, planting 24 rare Black Poplars along the stream, within an enclosed Beaver fence, ready for a beaver re-introduction soon.

You can see us on YouTube talking to Chris Packham about Black poplars.





© Nicoleta Carpineanu

Forests Without Frontiers (FWF) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to restoring nature across Europe and the UK for future generations. FWF is guided by three core principles of Restore, Nurture & Inspire.

Collaborations with Forests without Frontiers on four sites this year helped us to increase our volunteer engagement and deliver conservation work more effectively by combining resources and expertise.

Match funding has played a vital role in this partnership, allowing us to extend our capacity, deliver more conservation work and to increase the creation of new hedges and woodlands across the Ouse landscape.

~£500
match
funding



© Nicoleta Carpineanu

Social Media collaborations have been vital in reaching new audiences online.

By combining our organisations followers, we gained more reach and more engagement in our work and messaging.



Barcombe Eco Fair

Wilder Ouse attended the Barcombe Eco Fair this year - to support the local community, talk with stakeholders, and connect with other organisations.

The event provided a great opportunity to showcase the project's work and engage with new individuals who may benefit from support on their journey towards nature recovery.



© Natasha Padbury

Lewes Floods

25th Anniversary

Learning from the past. Preparing for the future.

Wilder Ouse had a stall at the Lewes Floods Anniversary this year. It was a great opportunity to discuss how we can work together to use Natural Flood Management to help reduce the chance of these huge floods happening again. There were multimedia exhibitions, bringing together local people's films, photos, paintings, audio memories and more from the 2000 floods.

Community Resilience Volunteers



Wilder Ouse



Wilder Ouse would not be able to achieve what it delivers, without our incredible volunteers. The time they dedicate to the project and it's objectives is astonishing.

Since the start of the Wilder Ouse delivery season in September, they have dedicated 412 hours to creating and restoring habitats across the catchment.

Our volunteers get trained in leaky dam building, tree planting, invasive species removal, and a wide range of other conservation skills.

We continue to welcome and train new volunteers, and many long-standing volunteers remain committed to the project. Their continued involvement allows them to pass on their knowledge and skills to newcomers, creating a strong culture of peer learning. It's a fantastic example of effective knowledge sharing in action.



14
volunteer
work parties



We estimate the value of our volunteer hours this year to be higher than £15,000. An incredible contribution from Wilder Ouse's volunteers.



Wildlife Pond Guidance & Upskilling Young People

The University of Sussex runs a Forest Food Elective Module, and the module lead asked Wilder Ouse to give a talk to their students. They had received funding to create a large wildlife pond in their forest food garden and were looking for advice on best practice and the importance of ponds as a habitat.

Wilder Ouse provided verbal and visual guidance on how to design ponds in a wildlife-friendly way along with another PHD student researching urban agriculture and invertebrates.



The chalk spoil arising from the pond diggings, was used to create a chalk mound within the forest food garden. This will be a bug and bee bank, to support local invertebrates.



Youth led nature recovery

4 youth
workshops
in leaky dam
creation

Including young people in nature conservation is essential, for their personal development, and for securing the long term future of the natural environment.

The Wilder Ouse project is actively seeks to embed youth action in our work through practical conservation tasks, supporting equity across access to practical conservation skills.



©Harriet Trueman

64
students in
total

In total, 64 students attended Wilder Ouse workshops to deliver natural flood management and to mimic the ecology of Beavers

These workshops give young people agency, skills, and a sense of empowerment that they can make a difference.



©Harriet Trueman

Local Wildlife Sites



We supported
work on 5
Local Wildlife
Sites



2 projects
were
delivered
adjacent to
LWS

Local Wildlife Sites are particularly important for wildlife, and are selected using scientifically determined criteria and surveys.

This year, Wilder Ouse helped enhance 2 LWS and provided advice for 3 others on nature recovery. There is little support for landowners of LWS, we help as much as we can



Councillor site visits - Hoath Wood



Since 2018, Lewes District Council have been working in partnership with Wilder Ouse and our previous incarnation, Sussex Flow Initiative.

Our partnership includes the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust - local experts in restoring rivers, enhancing fish habitats and catchment management.

Our partnership was formed through the foresight of an LDC Councillor, who realised that supporting Natural Flood Management was crucial to reducing flood pressure on Lewes and other local towns.

Each year, we dedicate time to supporting LDC Councillors to understand the scope and value of the work that we do.

Our work provides key benefits to society including :

- Access to Nature
- Flood resilience
- Climate resilience
- Nature recovery





Sussex Wildlife Trust

Strategic Goals 2030

How Wilder Ouse is contributing to Our Wild Sussex strategy



Restore abundant wildlife across large scale landscapes and the sea.

Catchment scale project focusing on nature recovery for wildlife.

Create climate resilient landscapes and thriving wildlife habitats.

Habitat creation through natural flood management.

Strategic Transformations

Restore and protect at least 30% of Sussex land and sea for nature.

Efficient GIS recording of delivery across the catchment.

Connect people with nature and inspire 1 in 4 to take meaningful action for wildlife.

Direct work with communities, landowners, managers, parishes and councils.



Link to [Our Wild Sussex](#)



Sussex Wildlife Trust - Pan Organisational Working

330k views!

Communications Team

Wilder Ouse collaborates with the communications team to deliver a range of content designed to engage audiences in the project and wider wildlife topics.

Click the link to learn about Dung Beetles on Tiktok!



Education Team

Wilder Ouse has worked closely with the SWT education team for several years, focusing on engaging young people in the project and providing opportunities for them to learn about and connect with nature in the Ouse catchment.



©Tony Powell

Nature Reserves

Wilder Ouse has been sustainably resourcing our stakes for leaky dam creations from Sussex Wildlife Trust's Nature Reserves team. With many thanks to the staff and volunteers for producing approximately 100 stakes!



©Harriet Trueman

Making the Ouse catchment 'Beaver ready'

After being hunted to extinction more than 400 years ago, beavers are now recognised as a European Protected Species and an increasingly valuable but threatened part of England's natural environment.

With the right support, returning beavers can greatly benefit farming and the wider landscape by building dams that slow water - helping to restore rivers, reduce flood risk, ease drought, and create thriving wetlands that support a rich diversity of wildlife.



© David Parkyn

What does 'Beaver Ready' mean for Wilder Ouse?

- Supporting landowners by informing individuals of funding and support available regarding Beavers (Countryside Stewardships and Sustainable Farming Incentives). These can reduce beaver-land management conflict.
- Offering peer and expert advice in Beaver ecology to catchment stakeholders.
- Creating, restoring and enhancing suitable beaver habitat to prepare for reintroduction of species.

Organisational Resilience Feedback



Wilder Ouse

“ I was hugely impressed by the amount of SWT staff and volunteer expertise on show today at Bowyer's Wood. Brilliant stuff and nice for a Trustee to get their boots muddy and see SWT in action. The filmed chat with Chris P on black poplars went really well. ”

Mark Mallalieu - Sussex
Wildlife Trust Trustee



“ The expertise and ongoing support from Wilder Ouse has been invaluable. We can already see the positive impact of the pond and scrapes on wildlife, and the benefits are rippling out into our education and community work here at Lovebrook too! ”

Rich, Community Farm
Landowner - Lovebrook

“ In 2025, we received email digital guidance from Wilder Ouse on current practices and links to community groups supporting species counts. A Wilder Ouse site visit followed in 2026, this was instructive and informative, showing how experts view the habitats and allowing discussion of new ideas. The value of such personal contact on site for volunteers cannot be overestimated, leaving us inspired and energised. ”

Susan - Friends of Blunts
Wood and Paige's Meadow

What we advise on



Wilder Ouse



©Nigel Symington

Natural Regeneration



©Harriet Trueman

Natural Flood Management



©Harriet Trueman

Climate Adaptation



© Alice Parfitt

Regenerative Agriculture



©Harriet Trueman

Pond & Wetland creation/restoration



©Derek Middleton

Nature-based solutions



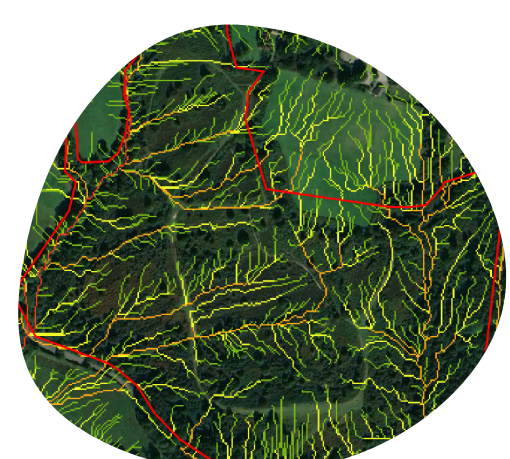
©Harriet Trueman

Nature Recovery Networks



© Mike Murphy

Land management



GIS mapping of landscapes

7 year achievements



Wilder Ouse

This year we were asked to create an infographic showing what had been achieved by Sussex Flow Initiative and Wilder Ouse in the last 7 years. To see the full report, follow this link: [Wilder Ouse](#). The highlights are below.

Minimum Ha of land ownership taking practical action for nature

Ha of land advised

Minimum number of sites taking practical action for nature

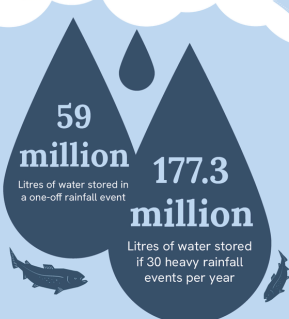
3,000



6,624



50



Ha of priority habitat created
(Woodland, meadow and open water)



Whats next for Wilder Ouse?



Wilder Ouse

Wilder Ouse Conference

On the 26th June, Wilder Ouse is hosting a catchment wide conference to bring together landowners, land managers, parish councils and communities. To showcase the resources and support available for nature recovery.

Nature Recovery Network

Wilder Ouse will map out a nature recovery network of the Ouse river catchment. A joined up system of places which can support people and nature, on land and at sea.

Continue to grow landowner connections

Since we started work in the Ouse, our network of landowners and communities has become huge. We will continue to expand our connections across the catchment, to deliver nature recovery at scale.

Bringing Back Beavers

Decades of work across Sussex and the UK, have brought us to the thrilling point of seeing beavers restored to the Ouse soon - after Centuries of absence. We will support and guide the transition to Living with beavers once more.

Diversity, Inclusion and Young People

We will try our hardest to expand the reach of the project to include more marginalised communities, and those who might otherwise feel unable to participate in nature and practical conservation tasks.

Landscape scale Life Networks

Watch this space for more news on how we can help create a vibrant, healthy, engaging and connected landscape for all.





Wilder Ouse

2025 - 2026

Thank you



<https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/get-involved/projects/wilder-ouse>



WilderOuse@sussexwt.org.uk



Acknowledgments

With special thanks to our funders



Lewes District Council



Wealden
District Council

