

Horsley Nature Action Plan

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Horsley Nature Action Plan (HNAP)

2025-2030



** Word Cloud created in 2015 from words by villagers describing aspects of the environment important to them*

[Note that the Table of Proposed Actions for the Action Plan is currently in a separate document. This is to aid review while the plan is finalized. The proposal is to include this table in section G plus another table in Section I to show Year 1 projects and timelines once it is agreed.]

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A. Background

Horsley Parish Council (HPC) is committed to conserving and enhancing biodiversity in the Parish. This commitment is enshrined in policies within the Horsley Neighbourhood Development Plan (HNDP) published in 2019 and a HPC Biodiversity Policy agreed in 2025 [tbc]. Together these policies exercise the Parish Council's statutory duty to Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, updated by Section 102 of the Environment Act 2021.

The updated legislation and further government guidance states that public authorities including Town and Parish Councils must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity and, specifically:

- Agree policies and specific objectives based on this consideration
- Act to deliver their policies and achieve their objectives

Horsley Parish Council's Biodiversity Policy and Objectives are set out in detail in a separate document (HPC 2025). A clear link is demonstrated between the newly adopted Biodiversity Policy and earlier environmental policies within HPC's Neighbourhood Development Plan (2021). For example, during the neighbourhood planning process, parish consultation informed HNDP's 'Vision for Nature' – this then served to shape the ensuing development-oriented environmental policies, and continues to inform this Nature Action Plan. The HNDP was approved in 2021 and is actively used by HPC to guide decision making in planning and land use¹, including 'Biodiversity and Ecology' and other environmental policies such as 'Dark Skies'.

Horsley's Nature Action Plan (HNAP), has been written in response to the request from Stroud District Council (SDC) that Parish and Town Councils take 'further steps to conserve and enhance biodiversity' and prepare a five year 'Local Nature Action Plan' (LNAP) for nature recovery. LNAPs are designed to complement and support countywide 'Local Nature Recovery Strategies' for which Gloucestershire's strategy is in preparation [due 2025].

This Action Plan builds on the 'specific' Biodiversity Objectives, outlined in Section B below. Important background, actions and projects that have been actively pursued by residents and which have already benefited biodiversity and nature connection are summarised in Section C with supporting maps in Section D. The successes of past actions and projects have been considered in Section E. A table of 'Ongoing and Future Actions' (Section F, Table 1) is the most important part of this Action Plan. The Table lists a number of possible projects and actions, and the most urgent of these in terms of nature recovery are prioritized.

The Action Plan will require the collaboration of everyone - local people, the Parish Council and other stakeholders - in a bid to conserve and enhance biodiversity in the Parish (Section H).

Finally, the Parish will show how it has stepped up to conserve and enhance biodiversity by reviewing the Plan annually, providing a summary of progress against actions, and sending a report to SDC or to the competent authority as relevant.

¹ The HNDP whilst dated 2019 – 2040, will be reviewed and updated in 2027. The HNAP will be updated to complement Gloucestershire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (which is in preparation).

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B. Horsley Parish Council 'Specific' Biodiversity Objectives for Nature Recovery

Based on the Principal Aims set out in the Horsley Parish Council's Biodiversity Policy, the following 'specific' objectives have been derived. It is against these that actions and projects have been formulated – these objectives will be used to assess priorities of the actions/projects outlined in Section F, Table 1:

1. **Ensure that all development proposals take account of the Parish's biodiversity and natural resources, with regard to the E3, E4, L and A1 policies within the HNBP.**
2. **Safeguard and improve landscape scale connectivity of species and habitats by promoting the linking of core habitat and biodiversity rich sites with corridors, stepping stones, buffers and restoration areas**
3. **Where possible, improve the condition of habitat within land under the auspices of the Parish Council (e.g. the playing field and playground, church grounds, Community Orchard and Nutgrove), using environmentally friendly practices to do so.**
4. **Work with key stakeholders to positively influence nature management; these include St Martin's Church, Horsley Primary School, Shortwood Football Club, Forestry England (Kingscote Woods), Local Green Space landowners, Ruskin/Horsley Mill, Highways England, other landowners, interest groups and experts.**
5. **Support and encourage ongoing and new nature recovery projects within the Parish (within and between hamlets and in the wider countryside), including actions that improve wellbeing by bringing a significant number of parishioners closer to nature (e.g. nature walks, bioblitzes, communications in parish magazine, gardening for wildlife). Look for collaborative opportunities outside the Parish with, for example, Nailsworth and Tetbury Councils.**

C. The Biodiversity of Horsley Parish

Horsley Parish has a rich biodiversity. A significant amount of work was undertaken to document this as part of the development of the HNBP. This section borrows from this and includes an excerpt from the HNBP, section 6.3 'Biodiversity and Ecology'. See also Annex 5 of the HNBP 'Conservation Value of Habitats and Species in Horsley Parish' part of which is provided in this document in Appendix 1.

The landform of Horsley Parish has determined where settlements and highways have been built, and, together with the underlying geology and hydrology, this influences the location of the Parish's characteristic wildlife and associated habitats.

The natural character areas of the Parish can be described grading upwards from low to high altitude. This takes in three distinct habitat types:

- the floodplain of the valley bottoms defined by Horsley Brook
- the deeply incised valley sides including tributary streams and springs
- the open farmland of the Cotswold 'tops'.

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A more detailed description of each of these distinct habitats is provided in Appendix 2 of this document.

D. Supporting Maps

Horsley's Neighbourhood Plan featured a map of 'priority' habitats for the west of the Parish. Priority habitats are those listed in Section 41 of the NERC Act, and deemed of principal importance for conserving biodiversity in England, including habitats like woodland, grasslands and wetlands. This map showing is Figure 6 (page 43) of the HNBP and is included in this document in Appendix 3. Note that there is no current map for the east of the parish including the Cotswold 'tops' at Barton End and Ledgemore. The map (page 44 of the HNBP) also proposes ecological networks for the west of the Parish.

These maps can be used to target nature recovery and restoration areas, at least in the west of the parish.

E. Past Actions

Work relating to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity has been undertaken in the Parish for several years. In 2015, parishioners were consulted in each of the hamlets and at village hall meetings about what was important to them in the local environment. It became clear that biodiversity, ecology and the natural environment were very important, and this information helped to progress the biodiversity and nature access policies for the HNBP.

The biodiversity, nature access and other environmental policies within the HNBP continue to provide guidance for the work of HPC in the assessment of planning applications. This includes the protection of two Local Green Spaces:

Implementation of Local Green Spaces (LGSs). Two LGSs were approved and adopted by the HNBP. These provide special protection against development.

The justifications for these were in part based on their propensity to improve parishioner engagement with nature. LGS1 included in its justification that it was "an important, informal community asset" with a "tranquil feel" and a special ambience. LGS2 was justified in part on the basis that "development ... would be especially detrimental to the peaceful setting of St Martin's church ... and its churchyard". Designating both areas as LGSs was believed to "respond to the local desire to be immersed in nature and so promote wellbeing and physical and mental health".

Two other areas of work are now complete. These are highlighted here to draw attention to their considerable achievements for biodiversity gain (in the case of Natural Flood Management) and in bringing people closer to nature (Walking & Cycling).

Natural Flood Management. In the past few years, three Natural Flood Management initiatives have been co-ordinated and funded by Stroud District Council (SDC) in collaboration with several landowners along tributaries of the Nailsworth Brook around Horsley. These works are designed to slow the flow during times of heavy rainfall and will alleviate the danger of flooding further downstream outside the Parish.

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Where leaky dams have created ponds within a widened floodplain they have inevitably increased wetland biodiversity:

- The Kingscote and Horsley Woods tributary was re-instated to its old meandering channel in pasture at Hay Lane
- Leaky dams were installed further up in the woods towards Binley Farm. Here hydrologists from the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust have been commissioned by SDC to monitor water flows and understand above and below surface retention. This monitoring is ongoing and the preliminary results look very positive.
- Most recently, work to install leaky dams has been undertaken along another tributary in fields south of Sugley. Sometimes prone to flooding, this flashy stream then flows through Downend and through to the Horsley Brook/Nailsworth stream.

These projects are fully supported by the Parish Council and underlined by policies within the HNAP. This work conforms with Parish Local Nature Recovery Objectives 2 and 4.

Walking & Cycling Project. Having been a recipient of a number of capital grants, the second project, to encourage cycling and walking in the parish accomplished the following:

- Nine stiles, pedestrian gates, kissing gates plus a long reach of steps repaired or replaced in spring 2024. The work was marked by a village walk encompassing the restored routes.
- A cycle shelter including a lock-up for an e-bike built in early 2025. The Bike Drop initiative (co-ordinated by Transition Stroud and run by local volunteers) provides Horsley's e-bike for short-term hire. To celebrate this achievement, a public event 'GoCycle Horsley', encouraging local people to take up cycling, in March 2025.

Walking and cycling in nature can help people connect with the natural environment and improve their health and well-being. And it has been shown that people who are better connected with nature are more likely to care for nature and live in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way. This work conforms with Biodiversity Objective 5.

F. Ongoing and Future Actions

The table below [N.B. currently a separate document] shows ongoing and new projects and actions. These are cross-referenced to HPC Biodiversity Objectives and HNAP Policies. The Actions are mainly grouped by habitat type. Each action indicates priority, lead responsibility and stakeholder involvement.

Some of these activities may require small amounts of funding. HPC have committed to review annual budgets with this in mind. Allocations of Parish funds may be made available to specific, small initiatives. Match funding may be sought from local grant-giving bodies for larger projects.

G. Partners and Stakeholders

The Parish Council will work with: any grouping of local landowners, farmers or tenant farmers; Parish Church Council, Vicar, Churchwarden; HOP and Growers groups; local nature / climate group e.g. HCAN and/or emerging 'Nature in Horsley'; youth groups; School and Parents Association, School Head and Governors; The Hog Public House and any other local businesses; 'The Hamlet' communities.

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H. Monitoring Outcomes and Communication Planning

Horsley Parish Council will review the Biodiversity Policy 2025 at least once per year by providing a summary of progress against actions. A report will be sent to SDC or to the competent authority as relevant.

For many of the projects, even where HPC is the landowner, the reported outcomes will be operational and related to inputs; for example, 'x number of trees planted by x date'. It is acknowledged that it will not be possible to measure scientific outcomes for nature recovery, demonstrating evidence of change; for example, an 'increase in the number of a target species such as hedgehogs', or measurement of the 'condition' of a particular habitat. This is because such measurement and quantification of change would require in depth ecological study and analysis, for which we do not have the required resources.

The delivery of actions will depend on a range of organisations, community groups, and individuals successfully developing, funding, and implementing projects that will cumulatively achieve the 2030 objectives. For delivery of actions there also may be advantages of working with neighbouring Parishes and organisations; for example, the emerging neighbouring organisation 'Nature in Nailsworth'.

I. Annual Programme and Project Management

A programme of selected projects will be agreed annually with the key organisations / groups.

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Appendix 1

Conservation Value of Habitats and Species in the Parish (from HNAP 2019)

This table is an excerpt from Horsley Neighbourhood Development Plan (Annex 5) but is not a definitive list; it indicates recorded species and habitats that are known to have recognized importance in a geographical, planning or legal ('protected') context. Many species groups are under-recorded.

Site features	Importance			Protection & notes
	National	County	Local	
Habitats				
Ancient woodland	+			Horsley & Kingscote Woods SSSI, Key Wildlife Sites
Unimproved limestone grassland; NVC category CG3	?	+		Annex 1 EU Habitats Directive; UK Priority habitat; Boscombe valley, potentially of national importance and certainly of County Wildlife Site importance, also Lower Lutheridge
Lowland meadow; NVC MG5	?	+		Annex 1 EU Habitats Directive; UK Priority habitat; above Downend/Tickmorend potentially of national importance and certainly of County Wildlife Site importance
Traditional orchards		+		Several; UK Priority habitat
Ponds, streams & associated wetland		+		The valley bottoms along Nailsworth Stream, flight ponds; includes UK Priority Habitat. Key Wildlife Site bottom of Hay Lane
Tufa springs and travertine	?	+		Springs and headwaters show tufa feature and at least two (in Kingscote & Horsley woods) sites with <i>Palustriella</i> mosses, therefore Annex 1 Priority habitat under the European Habitats Directive. Downend stream is lined with travertine and has significant tufa dams
Species-rich semi-improved grassland			+	Widespread in the west Parish. Not Priority Habitat but included in Priority Habitats list by JNCC; has great restoration potential, see Priority Habitats Map
Arable headlands			+	Priority Habitat – includes Chavenage Estate

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Site features	Importance			Protection & notes
	National	County	Local	
Unimproved neutral grassland (NVC -MG1)			+	Verges with abundant wild-flowers including Meadow Crane's-bill and Lady's Bedstraw
Broad-leaved woodland (some ancient) & associated scrub			+	Often with poor ground-flora but of high value to bird assemblage
Species-rich ancient hedgerows			+	Old hedgerows with attendant flora; old suckering elms
Veteran trees			+	Not surveyed, need report/final survey; may be county importance
Mammals				
Lesser Horseshoe bat	+			Annex 2, EU Habitats Directive, WCA (Wildlife and Countryside Act); maternity roost known; Rockness stone mines - hibernation, spring & autumn
Greater Horseshoe bat	+			Rockness stone mines, hibernation & lecking roost
Serotine	+			Echolocating around Downend
Brown Long-eared bat	+			Maternity roost known, maybe destroyed
Noctule	+			Echolocating over Horsley, WCA, Habitats Directive
<i>Myotis</i> spp	+			Echolocating Narrowcut Lane and elsewhere
Soprano Pipistrelle	+			Horsley stream, WCA, Habitats Directive
Common Pipistrelle	+			Widespread, maternity roosts known, WCA, Habitats Directive
Otter	+			WCA, CRoW (Countryside and Right of Way) Act, Horsley Mill
Hedgehog		+		WCA, declined by a third since 2000
Water-vole	?			WCA, CRoW Act probably not present now at Horsley Mill
Yellow-necked mouse			+	Restricted to south Britain, recorded Downend & Tickmorend

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Site features					Importance		Protection & notes
National		County	Local				
Bird assemblage							
Birds of woodland, scrub, grassland and Cotswold plateau				+	There is an excellent range of bird species including those that are BoCC4 (Birds of Conservation Concern) (see below):		
Breeding (or possible breeding) birds (not definitive); BoCC4 (BTO 2016)							
Marsh Tit			+		BoCC4 (2015 data) red list		
House Sparrow			+		BoCC4 (2015 data) red list		
Skylark			+		BoCC4 (2015 data) red list		
Grey Wagtail			+		BoCC4 (2015 data) red list		
Yellow Hammer			+		BoCC4 (2015 data) red list		
Song Thrush				+	BoCC4 (2015 data) red list		
Mistle Thrush				+	BoCC4 (2015 data) red list		
Dipper			+		BoCC4 (2015 data) amber list		
Swift			+		BoCC4 (2015 data) amber list		
House Martin			+		BoCC4 (2015 data) amber list		
Dunnock				+	BoCC4 (2015 data) amber list		
Bullfinch				+	BoCC4 (2015 data) amber list		
Mallard				+	BoCC4 (2015 data) amber list		
Green Woodpecker				+	BoCC4 (2015 data) Green, downward trend in SW England		
Vascular plants plant species, sub-species or varieties that are rare or uncommon, either internationally, nationally or more locally, including those that may be seasonally transient, examples as follows							
Herb Paris <i>Paris quadrifolia</i>				+	Very local, ancient woodland		
Orchids - Pyramidal <i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i> , Bee <i>Ophrys apifera</i>				+	Local, unimproved meadows		
Small teasel <i>Dipsacus pilosus</i>				+	Local, ancient woodland and fen		
Spurge Laurel <i>Daphne laureola</i>				+	Local, mainly ancient woodland		
Stinking Hellebore <i>Helleborus foetidus</i>				+	Local, deciduous woodland		

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Lichens				
Horsley churchyard assemblage			+	Local interest – over 90 species recorded, BLS Lichen database
Reptiles and Amphibians				
Great Crested Newt (GCN)	?			UK BAP species; needs verification; legally protected Sched 5, 9 (1-5) WCA (Wildlife and Countryside Act); CHS Regs 2010
Common Frog				Widespread Horsley, WCA 1981
Common Toad				Local Horsley, WCA 1981
Smooth Newt			+	Legally protected by Sched 5, Sect 9 (5) WCA 1981
Palmate Newt			+	Legally protected by Sched 5, Sect 9 (5) WCA 1981, widespread Horsley
Viviparous Lizard			+	Legally protected by Sched 5, Sect 9 (1 & 5) WCA 1981. Local Horsley declining England
Slow-worm			+	Legally protected by Sched 5, Sect 9 (1 & 5) WCA 1981, widespread Horsley
Grass Snake			+	Legally protected by Sched 5, Sect 9 (1 & 5) WCA 1981. Local Horsley and UK; declining

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Site features				
Importance		Protection & notes		
National	County	Local		
Fish				
Bullhead		+		Annex 2 Habitats Directive, Priority Species; Horsley stream
Invertebrates (under-recorded)				
Silver-washed Fritillary		+		Local, wooded scarps Horsley
Invertebrates (under-recorded)				
Local, wooded scarps Horsley				
Dotted bee-fly			+	Gardens Downend
Downland Villa (a bee-fly)	+			Limestone grassland around Horsley village

Geology				
Jurassic stone-mines, including mollusc fossils (Downend)			+	
Habitats and species of importance to the local community				
Wild Garlic, Primrose, Cowslips, Orchids (several species), Bluebells, Blackberries, Sloes, anthills				
Badgers, Foxes, Pipistrelles, Common Lizard, Slow-worms				
Green Woodpecker, Dipper, Red Kite, Kingfisher, Sparrowhawk, Tawny Owl, Goshawk				

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Appendix 2

Horsley Parish Habitat Description (from HNDP 2019)

The Parish comprises of three distinct habitat types

The relatively narrow **floodplain** including mill ponds provide:

- Marsh, fen and wet woodlands, supporting a wide range of species. This includes fen vegetation with Meadowsweet, Great Willowherb, Water Mint, Opposite-leaved Golden saxifrage and an abundance of sedges such as Pendular and Remote Sedges. Here there is also a local profusion of an uncommon species, the Small Teasel. These habitats are important for wetland insects and pollinators, which in turn provide food, for example, for the nationally (red-listed) declining Grey Wagtail, Marsh Tit and Willow Tit.

It is the **valley sides** which arguably provide the most diverse range of habitats, including:

- Ancient beech and ash woodlands and copses on steep valley sides supporting a suite of plants and animals, for example the Silver-washed Fritillary butterfly. These woodlands include the nationally designated 'Kingscote & Horsley Site of Special Scientific Interest' (SSSI), between Sandgrove (Horsley) and neighbouring Kingscote Parish.
- Old, rolling permanent pastures and hay meadows of the valley slopes. Of specific interest are (a) unimproved calcareous grasslands with characteristic limestone wildflowers and insects in the Boscombe, Downend and Lutheridge valleys, and (b) neutral grasslands including very species-rich hay meadows north of Downend/Tickmorend and between Wallow Green and Nailsworth. Grazing by sheep or cattle and associated dunging support an insect biomass essential for birds and bats, including Greater Horseshoe and Serotine bats. Anthills are evident in many of the ancient pastures; these are home to the Yellow Meadow Ant, which provides essential food for one of Horsley's iconic birds, the Green Woodpecker.
- Dense hedgerows providing interconnecting wildlife corridors between the valleys and the Cotswold tops. These are, for example, essential conduits for small mammals, wintering thrushes and bats including pipistrelles, *Myotis* species and the Lesser Horseshoe. They also provide habitat for a range of breeding birds. Associated wide headlands provide refuge for a range of insects and reptiles such as Slow-worms and the Common Lizard.
- Scrub and thickets, particularly in the vicinity of the Boscombe valley, supporting Yellowhammer, Linnet, and Common Whitethroat breeding territories.
- Traditional orchards around the hamlets boasting local fruit varieties and providing potential habitat for the Noble Chafer beetle (a S41 Priority Species).
- Multiple springs and tributary streams emerging from the underlying limestone aquifers. These are widespread and include valley-sides of the Horsley Brook, the Boscombe to Woodleaze Farm valley in the west, through to Ledgemoor Bottom near Chavenage in the east. Many of these springs form active tufa (calcium carbonate) deposits, some of which support specialised mosses which qualify these areas as Priority Habitat under the EU Habitats Directive. High energy streams, for example along Horsley Brook and in Downend, support Dipper territories.

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- Stone-mines under Rockness supporting hibernating both Lesser and Greater Horseshoe bats.

Finally, the **Cotswold tops** are noted for:

- Wide arable headlands where these are provided (often as part of agri-environment schemes as beetle banks and nectar sources).
- Drystone walls and barns, which are refuges for small mammals and Barn Owl, flocks of farmland finches, Red Kite and Buzzard.

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Appendix 3

Map of Priority Habitats in the Parish

This map is from the HNAP. It is not a complete mapping of the Parish habitats; it is focused on the western half of the Parish. There is the potential to increase its scope as part of this HNAP.

