

# ***The Sevenoaks Living Landscapes Vision***



The landscape south of Sevenoaks is one of the gems of the Kentish countryside: a distinctive patchwork of ancient woodland, lush pastures and hedgerows, punctuated by arable fields, orchards and small ponds, which runs from the Greensand Ridge through to the Low Weald. The area contains important core sites for biodiversity, and has great potential for enriching the wildlife-value of existing habitats and restoring much of the past biodiversity of the landscape.

This is the basis for the Sevenoaks Living Landscape Project, covering a stretch of countryside between Sevenoaks, Bough Beech and Ivy Hatch, which aims to create a living landscape by:

- Working with a range of public and private land owners to enhance, extend and link existing wildlife habitats to create a large and connected 'core area' of habitat which supports key species of conservation importance and is maintained and enhanced through effective nature conservation management.
- Buffering this core area by encouraging the surrounding land to be managed in a wildlife-friendly manner.
- Inspire local people about the value of the natural environment in the area, encourage them to experience it and enable them to take action to support the Living Landscape project

Demonstrate how increased conservation management and a more wildlife rich environment can support local businesses and benefit local communities

## **Important habitats and species**

Of the wealth of important habitats that the area supports, four have been identified where targeted action would be most effective to make a significant improvement to biodiversity at a landscape scale.

- **Species Rich grassland**  
Increase species diversity of grassland and pasture
- **Woodland**  
Develop and implement management plans for woodlands that are not in conservation management.
- **Ancient or species rich Hedges**  
Encourage the positive management, restoration of recreation of species rich hedgerows.
- **Ponds and other waterbodies**  
Manage and/or restore selected ponds.

To guide and inspire the project work, five key species or groups of conservation importance are identified for specific action that will also benefit a wide range of other wildlife. These actions will contribute to national and local Biodiversity Action Plan targets.

**1 Barn owl** This bird has declined over the past fifty years as a result of the reduction of prey availability, and the loss of suitable roost and nest sites. Good habitat for barn owls is open countryside that contains a good mixture of rough grassland marshland, scrubland, young tree plantations, hedgerows, edge of woodland & field margins left alongside hedgerows. Key factors for barn owl conservation are the provision of nest and roost sites – barn owls are traditionally associated with old barns and hollow trees but take readily to nestboxes placed in modern farm buildings, trees, or spaces provided in barn conversions - and ensuring a plentiful

supply of food and therefore improving habitat for small mammals. They primarily eat voles but also regularly include mice, shrews and rats in their diet. Their prey occurs at highest densities in rough grassland – tall, tussocky grass with a thick litter layer. Grass that's too short, lacks a litter layer, or is overgrown with scrub is far less suitable for barn owls.

*Action 1.* Increase the amount of rough grassland in the area by creating conservation headlands on arable fields and alongside hedgerows.

*Action 2.* Install nest boxes in agricultural buildings and other suitable structures.

**2 Yellowhammer** The breeding population of the Yellowhammer has declined by more than 50% over the last 25 years so the species appears on the Red List of birds of high conservation concern. This decline is most likely due to the reduction of winter seed food availability as a result of agricultural intensification (for example, the loss of winter stubbles and a reduction in weed densities).

*Action 1:* create/leave wide rough grass field margins

*Action 2:* sow spring cereals and retain stubble over winter

*Action 3* Increase nesting opportunities through traditional hedgerow management

**3 Great crested newt** The great crested newt is rare at a European scale, and southern Britain is a stronghold for this species. Despite this, it has suffered significant and ongoing decline in recent years, mainly due to the loss of its breeding ponds.

*Action 1.* survey to identify important ponds and pond clusters

*Action 2* Implement management or restoration on potential breeding ponds

*Action 3* maintain or create suitable terrestrial habitat around suitable breeding ponds

**4 Butterflies and moths** Five of the UK's 60 resident butterflies have become extinct over the past 100 years and over half the remainder are threatened. Moths too have suffered major declines, with over two thirds of species affected, and the south-east of Britain seems to be the worst hit area. Many butterflies and moths are sensitive to how habitats are managed. They can disappear rapidly if management changes, so the intensification of practices such as farming and forestry has been one of main causes of the decline of butterflies and moths, particularly for the more specialised species. One of the biggest causes of decline amongst woodland butterflies has been the cessation of active broad-leaved woodland management, especially the decline of coppicing. In grasslands, many species need precise grazing regimes to maintain a suitable sward structure where the larval stages can develop.

*Action 1* increase species richness of grasslands

*Action 2* Develop and implement management plans for woodlands that are not in conservation management.

*Action 3* Implement conservation grazing management on important sites

**5: Bats** All bat species in Britain have declined significantly and are now protected by law. Despite this protection they continue to decline due to the loss of their feeding habitats such as hedgerows, woodlands and ponds and the reduced numbers of insects overall for them to feed on.

*Action 1.* Develop and implement management plans for woodlands that are not in conservation management.

*Action 2* increase extent of species rich hedge especially where this provides connections between habitats.

*Action 3* increase species richness of grasslands

## Monitoring

We will need to monitor these species and groups, to assess their current presence and distribution in the area, and how this changes over time. This will help to measure the success of the action we take and guide future proposals. A series of recording schemes are designed to involve local people in monitoring the changes in wildlife richness of the project area.