

Bexhill Town Council

Town Clerk

YEAR TWO REPORT

Bexhill Wild Domesday Project – 1st June 2024 to 31st May 2025

1. Introduction

The seventh report relayed by the Town Clerk to town councillors was detailed and extensive. As project manager, I have therefore made this end of year report shorter, yet it contains the essence of my work in the last year. Year Two has been intensely busy.

During Year Two of the project, advice and data have been given to the Council on the 30 key areas set out at Appendix A.

Projects

1. SIDLEY WOODS - PLANTING AND POOLS

After an exceptionally bureaucratic period lasting more than one year, involving many meetings, letters and emails and woodland visits and inspections, Rother District Council has finally given the project manager permission to go ahead with the previously approved list of species for planting of trees, shrubs, and flowering plants. Permission is also granted for the three large dragonfly pools – each with a volume of 6,800 litres of water. These pools are key to the Wild Domesday strategy of providing water for wildlife in times of drought. This project was agreed between Rother District Council's Neighbourhood Services Department and Bexhill Wild Domesday CIC in the Memorandum of Understanding forwarded to the Town Clerk on 6th June 2025. This MOU also involves monthly meetings with RDC at their request. Work has begun; tools obtained, and seeds and plants have been ordered. A programme of work with experience volunteers in being devised to enable all aspects to be completed in the next year. A baseline photographic and species identification survey is being conducted to log the wildlife in the wood with Sussex iRecord so that in future years the biological net gain can be established once the enhanced planting and pools take effect. At present the wood bears hardly any areas of pollinating or nectar plants for bees, but there are some good areas of bramble and nettles used by butterflies (Comma, Peacock, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell and migrating Painted Lady).

2. SIDLEY WOODS – LEAKY DAMS

ESCC Water Consenting official, Nigel Powers, visited Sidley Woods with one of Bexhill Wild Domesday CIC's directors (Dr Barry Yates) and the Town Council's project manager. At first, all seemed good. However, although £150.00 was paid to ESCC by Bexhill Wild CIC for the licence to install the dams, no licence was forthcoming because at the last minute a higher authority warned ESCC that the lower part of the stream was 'in an urban area'. Everyone already knew that in the first place, as it is part of Sidley.

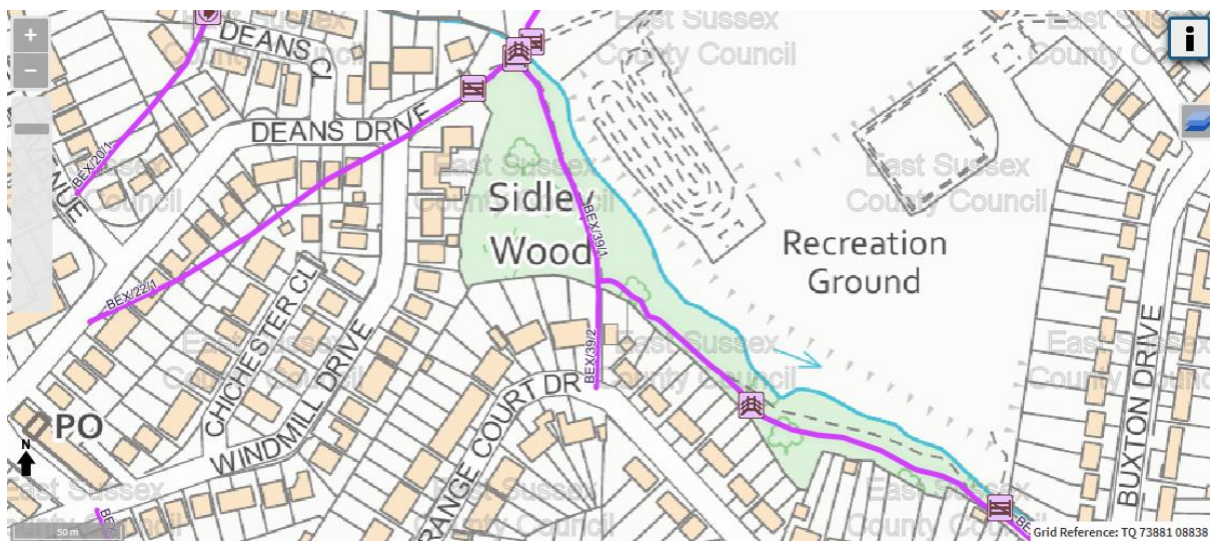
Nevertheless, this seemingly fatuous intervention slowed the project once again. However, now things have changed for the better and the High Weald authorities have taken over and started to draft the policy for ESCC using an expert on leaky dams. As project manager, I have refused to give up on this project despite more bureaucratic setbacks.



Sidley Woods and the Egerton Stream

This High Weald expert (Dean Philips) visited the woods with me and walked the whole length of the Egerton Stream section and confirmed that the new strategy is to use a series of existing large logs of timber insert into the stream bed. Therefore, it looks as though the project will go ahead this year and the project manager is now waiting for the licence.

The project manager continues to work with the High Weald organisation and ESCC Watercourse Consenting on the installation of Leaky Dams on the Egerton Stream to help reduce the flooding in Egerton Park when the tide gates are close and rainfall is high.



3. GALLEY HILL

Once again this has been an uphill struggle against local and national bureaucracy and government inflexibility. The Secretary of State declined to meet with the Town Clerk. Natural England stated that rather than permit the extension of the Combe Valley SSSI to cover Galley Hill, they would only permit a Local Nature Reserve to be set up.



This incredibly poor decision flies in the face of the fact that there is more rare wildlife at Galley Hill than there is in Combe Valley.

The whole national system of wildlife protection has become ridiculous, with lack of funding, lack of staffing and general confusion at county level as to who is responsible for wildlife protection. Furthermore, Galley Hill is now part of a national cycle trail and the newly implemented King Charles III National Footpath, thus increasing ‘footfall’ dramatically through national publicity.

When the project manager wrote to the Hastings Borough Council, including their legal team and supplied them with full details of how we could co-operated to protect the rare wild life at Galley Hill, they refused to help on the ground that the government had decided to remove the concept of Borough Councils from Sussex as part of the move to a Sussex Mayoral Authority.

They stated:

Apologies for the delayed reply to your email.

Having considered your proposal, what’s involved in setting up a local nature reserve, and the pressures currently on Hastings Borough Council’s resources, I regret to inform you that we are not in a position to support this request.

As this area of land is owned by a number of different parties, it will require significant input from the council to achieve the aims of your letter during a time where capacity is very limited.

A present, HBC, along with the other district and borough councils in East Sussex are focusing on the Government’s plans for devolution and local government reorganisation. Until this process has completed, we will not be in a position to support this request.

I would suggest that this be brought back to the new formed unitary council in a few years for consideration.

Kind Regards

Cameron Morley
Head of Environment and Operations

Nevertheless, the project manager will continue work with Natural England, Rother District Council and Hastings Borough Council and eventually the new mayoral authority for Sussex until we get somewhere on the conservation of Galley Hill’s exceptionally rare bees and other wildlife and beach landscape.



Although the Town Council is not the custodian of Galley Hill, councillors need to be aware that the situation is shockingly disgraceful and deeply unfortunate since Galley Hill is one of Bexhill's wildlife and landscape jewels and also nationally important for paleontological science.



Ashy Mining Bee at Galley Hill

and the exceptionally rare Grey-back Mining Bee previously believed to be extinct and yet discovered at Galey Hill in 2025.

4. CROWHURST LAKE/COMBE HAVEN



The deeply unfortunate situation at Crowhurst Lake drags on year after year, ever since the Bexhill to Hastings bypass was formed. When the rainfall drainage system was installed, no regard was given to the connection of the Powdermill Stream to Crowhurst Lake even though the Powdermill runs less than five metres from it and could easily be connected by a short pipe.





However, since the stream is not connected, the lake is full of stagnant rainwater and has died with no oxygenating plants. The extensive wildlife has fled and in summer the lake gets overwhelmed by cyanobacteria because there is no through-flow of oxygenated water to help it thrive.

Every now and then, when there is high rainfall or flash flooding, the overflow gate of the bypass drainage system permits cyanobacteria to enter the Combe Haven marsh. This is unsatisfactory and a threat to wildlife and to the pets of dog-walkers.

Cyanobacteria are dangerous, yet there are **no warning signs to advise owners to the threat to their pets and the even more serious threat to wild swimmers.**

The lake is regularly stocked by criminals and Sussex Rural Crime Team are aware of this. The large numbers of Golden Carp placed illegally in the lake quickly die and can be seen gasping and flipping in a desperate attempt to gain oxygen. The situation is a disgrace.



The County Ecologist is aware and has asked ESCC to do something, but nothing has happened. One reason for this is that even though the short pipe installation would save the lake, only the national level intervention of the Environment Agency can act to do this, and they are short of funds and staff. In any case the Powdermill Stream is a nationally listed water resource, as is the Combe Haven, so a huge bureaucratic process has to be undergone to get the authorities to look at the situation. Nigel Powers of ESCC Watercourse Consenting stated to the project manager:

"Regarding diverting of a watercourse. The Powdermill Stream which flows through Crowhurst is classed a main watercourse not an ordinary watercourse, it therefore comes under the regulatory powers of the Environment Agency not the Lead Local Flood Authority. "



When the project manager contacted the Environment Agency he received following reply:

"Dear Dennis - This would be dealt with at a National level.

Permanently diverting a main river would be a lengthy process and would include assessments and surveys to clearly define the effect this would have on the local area. As an example, these could include:

- Flood risk
- Ecological
- Geomorphological
- Invasive species
- Hydrological

This activity would also require a Flood Risk Activity Permit (FRAP) from the Environment Agency and permissions from any landowners where works would be conducted. There would also be concerns with regards to the cyanobacteria, the lake is adjacent to and upstream of the Combe Haven SSSI, hence this activity would require permission from Natural England via an Appendix 3 application. Unfortunately, the Environment Agency would not undertake this type of works but good luck with your project.

I hope this helps. Kind regards, Tracey

Tracey Essex - Cross Catchment Support Officer"

Nevertheless, the Project Manager will continue to work with the County Ecologist and the Environment Agency to enable the Powdermill Stream to enter Crowhurst Lake, thus preventing cyanobacteria from entering the Combe Haven SSSI.

5. NORMAN'S BAY VEGETATIVE BEACH

Following the great success of the Bexhill Beach Garden developed by ex-councillor Lyn Langlands and her supporters, a Bexhill Town Councillor has asked the project manager to help and advise on the construction of a vegetated beach area at Normans Bay within the bounds of the Bexhill ward. The project manager has provided a science-based planting list for the new beach area. Work has started to liaise with the Environment Agency at Pevensey to obtain permits for an area of beach to develop.

The project manager will work with Rother District Council, Marine Coastal authorities, and the Environment Agency to enable a new beach garden area at Norman's Bay within the bounds of Bexhill.

6. BEXHILL NATURE CLUB

Bexhill Nature Club has continued to grow under the auspices of Bexhill Wild Domesy CIC and now has more than 40 members. The project manager has been running the Club for almost a year, providing two presentations per session, free seeds, and refreshments. It has generated a convivial atmosphere and generated great interest in wildlife science.

7. FIELD VISITS: The Project Manager has continued to organise Field Visits to all areas of Bexhill's wildlife and landscape. The field visits are led by an expert who gives the members detailed explanations of the wildlife and landscape types encountered.

8. SUSSEX RESTRUCTURE: The Project manager is currently researching how these various projects mentioned above can be carried forward under the new political landscape for Sussex as a Mayoral Authority.

9. COMBE HAVEN COUNTRYSIDE PARK: The project manager has attended the meetings of the Countryside Park CIC Stakeholder meetings at the Discovery Centre in Freshfields, St Leonards.

10. BUTTERFLY POPULATION RECOVERY: The project manager has continued to support the Bexhill Wild Domesday CIC project to conserve the Small Tortoiseshell butterfly which is in decline.



Small Tortoiseshell Butterfly

11. BAT SURVEY

The project manager has continued to use ultrasonic equipment to survey bat mammals at Fairlight, Alexandra Park – Hastings and Pebsham and Sea Road in central Bexhill to produce data on the migration of bat species from Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and North Africa to Bexhill.



Nathusius' pipistrelle from Latvia now roosting in Bexhill

12. FREE SEEDS FOR BEXHILL

The project manager has continued to provide many thousands of free seeds for the people of Bexhill via his work with Bexhill Wild Domesday CIC. The intention is to provide one million free seeds before the Domesday Project ends.

13. WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK PAGE

The Project Manager has operated the project website and Facebook page.

14. INSURANCE

The Project Manager has ensured that all aspects of project work are insured to meet Council and Rother District Council legal requirements. Therefore, the cover has been raised from £5 million to £10 million.

15. CONCLUSION

Year Two has revealed that due to overwhelming bureaucracy and lack of forethought, some of Bexhill's amazing wildlife is under threat. This is nothing to do with climate change or sea level rises. The project manager will work ceaselessly to try and turn things round in this last year of the project which ends on 31st May 2026, unless the Town Council decides to extend it.

The Project manager will write to the Town Council in January 2026 to ask if the project is to continue.

Kind regards

David EP Dennis BA(Hons) AFRHS LCGI RAF

Project Manager

Bexhill Wild Domesday

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CONTRACTUAL DATA REQUIREMENT	DATA SOURCE USED
(1) Mammals	J - ULTRA
(2) Birds	J - ULTRA
(3) Reptiles & Amphibians	J – Sussex iRecord
(4) Fish	Sources: Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) → https://www.sussex-ifca.gov.uk Reports on local fish populations, biodiversity, and species surveys. CEFAS (Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science) → https://www.cefas.co.uk Scientific data on marine species and fisheries management. Sussex Wildlife Trust → https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk Marine conservation data and may list species in chalk reef and kelp habitats.
(5) Insects that are butterflies or moths	J – Sussex iRecord
(6) Other insects, spiders	Ultra – J – direct observation
(7) Molluscs, terrestrial land freshwater crustaceans, seashore crustaceans, other terrestrial and freshwater invertebrates, other seashore invertebrates -	Low tide beach patrols, recording and photography.
(8) Trees and shrubs	J
(9) Wildflowers	J – Sussex iRecord
(10) Grasses, rushes, sedges, lower plants, fungi	J – Sussex iRecord
(11) Climate overview	Met Office
(12) Weather records for Bexhill	J
(13) Sea Levels, Tidal and Coastal Conservation	Southampton University
(14) Coastal assets	Environment Agency (EA
(15) Rainfall trends	J
(16) Humidity records	Sources: Met Office – Historical Weather Data → https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/climate/maps-and-data/historic-station-data via Bexhill's nearest weather station at Hastings): historic and current humidity, temperature, and precipitation data. Weather Underground (Wunderground) → https://www.wunderground.com/history

(17)	Ground Water levels and flooding risks	Direct observation + Environment Agency
(18)	Landscape types and definitions	Direct observation
(19)	Farming	via Friends of Combe Valley
(20)	Roads and streets per ward	ESCC
(21)	Parks and Gardens	RDC
(22)	Natural water courses	ESCC Water Course Consenting and EA
(23)	Sewage and drainage	Southern Water + Environment Agency
(24)	Private Gardens	Bexhill Nature Club seeding programme
(25)	Dark Skies & Light pollution	– liaison with local Dark Skies expert
(26)	Food chain survival water	direct observation
(27)	Drought and Cyanobacteria	direct observation
(28)	Air Quality	<p>Sources: DEFRA UK-AIR (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) → https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk</p> <p>Interactive map or regional datasets in real-time and archived air quality data — including PM2.5, PM10, NO2, and ozone levels. East Sussex County Council Air Quality Reports → https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk via "Air Quality Annual Status Reports" for Bexhill and surrounding areas.</p>
(29)	Landscape pollution and Fly Tipping	RDC
(30)	Bathing Water Quality	<p>Sources: Environment Agency Bathing Water Profiles → https://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles</p> <p>Access data; “Bexhill” to access yearly test results for E. coli and intestinal enterococci, overall water quality rating, and pollution risk forecasts.</p> <p>Southern Water Bathing Water Portal → https://www.southernwater.co.uk/water-for-life/bathing-waters</p> <p>Includes real-time information on storm overflows and bathing quality alerts.</p>

NOTES TO APPENDIX A

The Project Manager is also the Journal Editor for the Hastings & East Sussex Natural History Society (HESNHSJ), so records collected for Bexhill's environment are shown above as: 'J'

Bexhill Wild Domesday CIC uses high-quality ultrasonic bird, small mammal, insect, and bat detection equipment. Tracking takes place from Winchelsea, Fairlight, Pebsham, Sea Road, Bexhill and Alexandra Park, Hastings to show migration routes from Latvia, Lithuania, and North Africa of rare bats. Data shown above as: ULTRA.

The Project Manager has also arranged for the digitisation of Sussex wildlife records for the last 130 years in a searchable database for academic comparison of trends in nature. Town Councillors can request trend data from phenological, native and migratory information collected since 1893. All other aspects are by direct links with major agencies and direct research.

GALLEY HILL BEES

Known Rare Bees mining at Galley Hill requiring urgent conservation status

Early Colletes (*Colletes cunicularius*)

Sussex = 223 Species

Grey-backed Mining Bee (*Andrena vaga*). This was previously thought to be extinct in Britain.

Other bees mining the cliffs

Gwynne's Mining Bee (*Andrena bicolor*)

Yellow-legged Mining Bee (*Andrena flavipes*)

Cliff Mining Bee (*Andrena thoracica*) (local cliffs are only last refuge of this bee in Sussex)

Hairy-footed Flower Bee (*Anthophora plumipes*)

Silvery Leafcutter Bee (*Megachile leachella*)

The Mourning Cleptoparasitic Bee (*Melecta albifrons*)

Spined Mason Bee (*Osmia spinulosa*)

Buffish Mining Bee (*Andrena nigroaenea*)

Trimmer's Mining Bee (*Andrena trimmerana*)

Hairy Yellow-face Bee (*Hylaeus hyalinatus*)

