

## What's our position on...

### The Arun Valley

The RSPB supports a strategic landscape-scale approach for the future of the Arun and Western Rother catchment, as part of the wider South Downs landscape, from both an ecological and socio-economic perspective. Our objective is to maximise the benefits for wildlife in the Arun Valley from any proposed future changes. This might be achieved by developing a dynamically functioning river valley, which allows a greater role for natural processes, whilst protecting and enhancing existing natural assets, delivered through strong collaborative working amongst land owners and key stakeholders.

#### Background

The RSPB is a national conservation organisation which provides expertise and advice on a range of wildlife matters, including advice to landowners and input to the development of national policy affecting biodiversity conservation. The RSPB is also involved in advising local authorities on the development of their Local Plans and engages with major planning applications for housing and other infrastructure development that may impact upon wildlife interests.

The RSPB is a landowner in the Arun Valley, with landholdings at Pulborough Brooks (256 ha) and Amberley Wildbrooks (133 ha plus another 81 ha managed on behalf of the Sussex Wildlife Trust). The RSPB also owns and operates a trading and visitor operation from its visitor centre at Wiggonholt.

The nature reserves at Pulborough Brooks and Amberley Wildbrooks form a large part of the Arun Valley Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and of the Arun Valley Special Protection Area (SPA) & Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar site). Amberley Wildbrooks RSPB reserve is part of the Amberley Wildbrooks Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Pulborough Brooks RSPB reserve is a SSSI in its own right, having been notified in 1998 as a direct result of RSPB management to increase its conservation value following its purchase in 1989.

Amberley Wildbrooks SSSI is arguably the 'jewel in the crown' of the Arun Valley, having long been valued for its diverse flora and fauna. It was notified as a SSSI in 1954 for supporting a highly diverse ditch flora, including several rare species, ditch fauna, including the rare and endangered little whirlpool ramshorn snail *Anisus vorticulus*, and its breeding bird assemblage. It also supports large numbers of wintering wildfowl, including Bewick's swan. The RSPB reserve has some of the best examples of all these features.

Pulborough Brooks has been restored from rank dry grassland of little conservation value to wet grassland supporting the majority of breeding waders in the valley and large numbers of wintering wildfowl, as well as rare ditch plants and the main population of little whirlpool ramshorn snail *Anisus vorticulus* which is the SAC feature. The wider matrix of habitats within the reserve support a rich breeding bird assemblage, including nightingale and barn owl, and a diverse range of other wildlife, including brown hairstreak butterfly, great crested newt, harvest mouse and barbastelle and Daubenton's bats.

The RSPB approach to landscape scale working is through the Futurescape framework. The Futurescape Vision for the South Downs states that we seek:

- High quality, functionally linked climate resilient habitats supporting robust populations of key species of wildlife.
- An improved awareness of the value of nature and its benefits to society among communities and visitors.
- A sustainable future for the South Downs secured through active working with partners and key stakeholders.

The RSPB has an existing role within the valley through working with partnerships such as Arun and Western Streams Catchment Partnership, South Downs National Park Authority (South Downs Partnership and South Downs Network) and through projects such as the Arun & Rother Connections Project (ARC), Heathlands Reunited, the South Downs Farmland Birds Initiative as well as working extensively with local communities.

## Main points

- The RSPB **supports** the development of a wider landscape vision for the River Arun and Western Rother, through a collaborative community-led approach, to secure a sustainable future for both wildlife and people (50 years+)
- The RSPB will **support** and **actively contribute** to the Arun Valley Vision Group (AVVG) through both Steering Group membership and as a wider network stakeholder.
- The RSPB will support the process of developing a joint Vision for the valley through **provision of expertise** and ecological survey and monitoring knowledge.
- The RSPB **seeks reassurance** that the outputs of the AVVG work **will influence** and where appropriate contribute to a revision of the Lower Tidal River Arun Strategy (LTRAS) prior to its implementation.
- The RSPB believes that **further evidence and modelling** is required in order to understand the implications of future adaptations and changes to the existing flood management regime/ infrastructure and will contribute actively to the development of this work.
- As a responsible landowner and conservation body the RSPB will honour its responsibilities to **maintain**, and where possible **enhance**, the features of interest of the designated sites (SSSI, Ramsar, SPA, SAC) through appropriate land management practice.
- The RSPB will actively promote the exploration of **innovative solutions** to the challenges facing the valley with a view to maximising natural capital and natural flood management in the valley where practicable and feasible and consistent with the other needs of the area
- The RSPB will work together with partners and stakeholders to explore and **secure future funding mechanisms** to achieve the practical delivery of a joint Vision for the valley.
- We are keen to ensure that the Arun Valley Vision work **contributes to national thinking**, policy development and guidance.
- We will work to ensure that there is a **positive legacy** of cooperation and collaboration between the wide variety of stakeholders beyond the two year timescale for the AVVG to develop a vision and action plan (January 2019.)

### Further information:

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