

FEN FARM

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

2025–2035 and beyond

Prepared to document habitat improvements achieved since 2020 and to establish a long-term framework for conserving and enhancing biodiversity at Fen Farm.

Prepared with reference to: Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment (The Ecology Partnership, September 2025).

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Executive Summary

Fen Farm has undergone a significant programme of habitat enhancement since 2020, resulting in measurable biodiversity gains. Habitat creation has included a substantial pond, native hedgerows, tree planting, scrub establishment and wildlife-focused infrastructure. This plan provides the framework for maintaining and enhancing these gains over the period 2025–2035.

1 Introduction

This Conservation Management Plan records ecological improvements delivered at Fen Farm and establishes a long-term management strategy. The plan supports biodiversity conservation, community engagement and sustainable land management.

2 Site Description

Fen Farm occupies approximately 1.62 hectares and comprises grassland, scrub, hedgerows, trees, allotments, pond habitat and associated community farm infrastructure. The site lies adjacent to Cokeham Brooks Local Wildlife Site and contributes to ecological connectivity within the wider landscape including the 'EPIC' Sompting Brooks project.

3 Habitat Improvements Since 2020

Since 2020, the farm has undergone a programme of habitat creation, restoration and landscape enhancement aimed at increasing biodiversity value while developing its role as a productive community farm. Ecological assessment undertaken in 2025 concluded that these works have generated a significant biodiversity net gain, including:

+21.41% habitat unit gain

+35.97% hedgerow unit gain

with statutory biodiversity net gain requirements comfortably exceeded. Key habitat improvements include creation and enlargement of pond habitat, establishment of native and species-rich hedgerows, planting of approximately 43 trees, enhancement of grassland management, development of scrub habitats and provision of nesting and refuge opportunities for wildlife.

Creation and Expansion of Pond Habitat

One of the most significant ecological enhancements has been the creation and enlargement of a substantial freshwater pond. The pond:

- Provides open water habitat.
- Supports aquatic and marginal vegetation.
- Offers breeding and refuge habitat for amphibians.
- Provides feeding opportunities for birds, bats and invertebrates.
- Increases habitat heterogeneity across the site.
- Contributes to sustainable water management and stormwater attenuation.

The 2025 biodiversity assessment identifies approximately **0.15ha of priority pond habitat** as a key component of the site's biodiversity gain.

Native Hedgerow Establishment

Since 2020, new native hedgerows have been planted, including:

- A native hedgerow along the western boundary.
- Species-rich native hedgerow planting around the northern edge of the site.
- Strengthening of existing boundary vegetation corridors.

These hedgerows have increased:

- Habitat connectivity.
- Shelter and nesting opportunities.
- Foraging resources through flowering and berry production.
- Wildlife movement between the wider landscape and the farm.

The Biodiversity Net Gain assessment records:

- Creation of approximately **30m of new native hedgerow**
- Creation of approximately **121m of species-rich native hedgerow**.

Tree Planting Programme

A substantial programme of native tree planting has been undertaken since 2020.

The assessment records:

- Existing baseline of six individual trees.
- Creation of approximately **43 new trees** across the site.

These trees will provide:

- Long-term structural diversity.
- Nesting habitat.
- Foraging opportunities for birds and bats.
- Carbon sequestration.
- Future deadwood habitat.

Photographic evidence within the ecological assessment confirms successful establishment of young trees.

Scrub Habitat Creation

New areas of mixed native scrub have been established and retained across the site.

Scrub habitats now provide:

- Nesting habitat for birds.
- Refuge for mammals.
- Invertebrate habitat.
- Transitional habitat between grassland and woodland edge conditions.

The retention and creation of scrub contributes significantly to ecological connectivity and structural diversity.

Grassland Management Improvements

Grassland areas have been managed to retain open habitat while increasing ecological value. Before 2020 there was much equine over-grazing. Improvements include:

- Reduced intensity management in selected areas.
- Retention of flowering species.
- Creation of habitat mosaics adjoining scrub and pond margins.
- Increased opportunities for pollinators and invertebrates.

Wildlife Infrastructure

Habitat enhancement proposals implemented or planned as part of the biodiversity strategy include:

Bird Nesting Features

- Installation of bird boxes.
- Provision of swallow nesting cups.
- Retention of mature trees and scrub nesting habitat.

Bat Conservation Features

- Installation of integrated bat boxes.
- Retention of dark commuting corridors.
- Sensitive lighting design.

Hedgehog Conservation

- Provision of hedgehog houses.
- Maintenance of wildlife movement routes.

Pollinator Features

- Bee bricks incorporated into structures.
- Flower-rich habitats associated with hedgerows and grassland.

4 Ecological Outcomes

The habitat enhancement programme has delivered measurable biodiversity gains, strengthened ecological connectivity, increased habitat diversity and enhanced opportunities for birds, bats, amphibians, pollinators and small mammals. By 2025, the enhancement programme had achieved the following:

Increased Habitat Diversity

The site now contains a richer mosaic of:

- Pond habitat
- Grassland
- Scrub
- Hedgerows
- Trees
- Crop growing areas

- Wetland edge habitat
- than was present in 2020.

Improved Connectivity

New hedgerows and tree planting strengthen ecological links between:

- Cokeham Brooks Local Wildlife Site.
- Adjacent agricultural land.
- Existing boundary vegetation.
- On-site habitats.

Enhanced Wildlife Opportunities

The site now offers improved habitat for:

- Nesting birds.
- Bats.
- Hedgehogs.
- Amphibians.
- Pollinating insects.
- Small mammals.

5 Conservation Vision and Objectives

Vision: To maintain Fen Farm as a productive community asset and a resilient ecological resource supporting wildlife, people and landscape-scale nature recovery.

Objectives:

- Maintain biodiversity net gain.
- Improve habitat condition.
- Enhance species diversity.
- Strengthen ecological connectivity.
- Encourage community stewardship.
- Support environmental education and citizen science.

6 Habitat Management Prescriptions

Pond Management

Objectives

- Maintain open-water habitat.
- Encourage diverse aquatic vegetation.
- Prevent excessive shading.
- Support amphibians and aquatic invertebrates.

Prescriptions

- Annual inspection each autumn.
- Remove invasive or dominant vegetation where necessary.
- Retain at least 70% vegetated margins.
- Desilt only when required and in sections.
- Maintain shallow marginal shelves.
- Avoid fish introduction.

Monitoring

- Annual photographic monitoring.
- Amphibian surveys every 3–5 years.

Hedgerow Management

Objectives

- Develop dense, species-rich hedgerows.
- Maximise flowering and berry production.
- Maintain wildlife corridors.

Prescriptions

- Trim on a 2–3 year rotation.
- Avoid annual cutting.
- Cut between September and February only.
- Retain occasional standard trees.
- Gap-up planting where mortality occurs.

Monitoring

- Condition assessment every three years.
- Observe flowering and fruiting performance.

Tree Management

Objectives

- Secure establishment of newly planted trees.
- Increase canopy cover.
- Develop future veteran tree resource.

Prescriptions

- Replace failed trees during first five years.
- Maintain guards and stakes.
- Remove guards once trees are established.
- Retain standing deadwood where safe.
- Avoid unnecessary pruning.

Monitoring

- Annual health inspections.
- Five-year survival assessment.

Grassland Management

Objectives

- Increase botanical diversity.
- Support pollinators and invertebrates.
- Maintain habitat mosaic.

Prescriptions

- Conservation strip grazing by sheep allowing rotational flowering
- In most ungrazed areas, hay cut in late summer.
- Remove cuttings where feasible.
- Retain some uncut refuge areas each year.
- Avoid fertiliser application.
- Prevent scrub encroachment where grassland is the target habitat.

Monitoring

- Botanical survey every three years.

Scrub Management

Objectives

- Retain structural diversity.
- Provide nesting habitat.
- Maintain habitat transitions.

Prescriptions

- Rotational management of up to 20% of scrub per year.
- Retain some mature scrub blocks.
- Prevent excessive encroachment into grassland.
- Carry out works outside bird nesting season.

7 Species Conservation Measures

Birds

- No hedge, scrub or tree clearance between March and August unless checked by a qualified ecologist.
- Maintain nesting boxes and swallow cups.

Bats

- Use minimum necessary warm-spectrum, downward-directed lighting.
- Inspect and maintain bat boxes.

Hedgehogs

- Maintain access gaps within fencing.
- Retain rough vegetation margins.
- Monitor use of hedgehog houses.

Amphibians

- Maintain pond habitat.
- Avoid contamination from agricultural chemicals.
- Retain rough grassland around pond margins.

8 Community Engagement and Partnerships

Fen Farm's conservation success relies upon continued community involvement and partnerships with local environmental organisations. The Fen Farm team benefits from ongoing collaboration with the Sussex Wildlife Trust and with the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust's EPIC Project conservation volunteers, known locally as the Sompting River Rangers. These partnerships contribute practical conservation expertise, volunteer capacity and ecological knowledge, supporting habitat creation, management and monitoring activities across the site.

Community actions include volunteer conservation days, biodiversity recording, educational events, interpretation and participation in wider nature recovery initiatives. Associated benefits include 'Mindfulness in Nature' sessions. Areas for development include School and community education events, Interpretation signage explaining habitats and wildlife, and Species recording submitted to local biological records centres.

9 Monitoring, Reporting and Review

Annual habitat inspections should assess habitat condition, species observations and management outcomes. A comprehensive ecological review should be undertaken every five years to evaluate performance and identify opportunities for further enhancement.

Annual Review

- Inspect all habitats.
- Assess habitat condition.
- Review management actions.
- Record species observations.

Five-Year Review

- Repeat habitat condition assessments.
- Review biodiversity gains and challenges.
- Update management prescriptions where necessary.

Success Indicators

By 2035 the site should demonstrate:

- Continued positive biodiversity net gain.
- Mature functioning hedgerows.
- Well-established tree cover.
- Diverse pond vegetation.
- Increased bird, pollinator and amphibian activity.
- Habitats maintained at moderate-to-good condition or better.

10 Key Seasonal Tasks Summary

Spring: Habitat inspections, tree maintenance, biodiversity recording.

Summer: Monitoring, invasive species control, educational events.

Autumn: Grassland cutting, hedgerow planting and habitat enhancement works.

Winter: Hedgerow management, scrub management and strategic planning.

Conclusion

Fen Farm has delivered substantial ecological improvements since 2020 and now provides a diverse mosaic of habitats supporting biodiversity and community engagement. This Conservation Management Plan provides a simple, practical framework to conserve and enhance these gains through the period 2025–2035, and for decades beyond.

Within this overarching conservation management strategy, more detailed practical conservation management measures will be developed each year based on detailed site observation, engagement with stakeholders including conservation organization partners, and synergy with the community farm's supported, nature-based food growing activities.