

Case Study

Woolbeding Community Habitat Mapping Project

Background

In early January 2013 the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) and the National Trust (NT) working together introduced the idea of creating a 'Community Habitat Map' to local residents in the parish of Woolbeding.

A habitat map plots the distribution and extent of habitats within a given geographical area. A habitat is an ecological or environmental area that is inhabited by a particular species of animal, plant, or other type of organism; a place where a living thing lives is its habitat.

The data collected will form a baseline that will show over time changes in the levels of biodiversity (variety of different types of life) in the area and will help to inform future decisions about helping to protect a particular species and or preserving an area of natural beauty.

A community habitat mapping project is a great opportunity for local residents to become involved and learn more about the wildlife on their doorstep, how to record it and how to protect it!

The total cost to produce the Habitat Map of £400 was funded jointly by the NT and SDNPA operations budget from the Wealden Heaths Area budget (£200 each).

The Community with the local species experts on a Bio-blitz day



The Project

SDNPA officers from across the organisation, including the Operations Directorate, the Cultural Heritage Strategy Team and the Biodiversity Strategy Team, together with colleagues from the NT, collectively pooled their expertise and resources in the delivery of training for local residents. Participants were able to develop a fuller understanding and knowledge of the wildlife and heritage on their doorstep and to get to grips with the all important mapping process.

The bulk of the walking on the ground was carried out over the spring and summer periods of 2013 and 2014. Each member of the community involved went out on the ground and mapped their individual 1 km squares and then, when finished, handed their map to a co-ordinator.

The team also set up a Bio-blitz weekend event and invited numerous wildlife recorders to come and record what they could find in the parish. This was a wonderful opportunity for local residents to meet the experts and glean lots of information. Eleven key habitats were identified and target notes were made highlighting some lovely species, interesting features, and an invasive species list.

The co-ordinator verified all the data recorded and drew up a complete draft map, which was handed to the Biodiversity Record Office (BRO) where volunteers digitised the map. This information is now being shared between the SDNPA, NT, the BRO, and other partners, and most importantly the community.

“It has brought the community together to zoom in and find out in much greater detail the richness of the environment where they live”

Fiona Scully National Trust

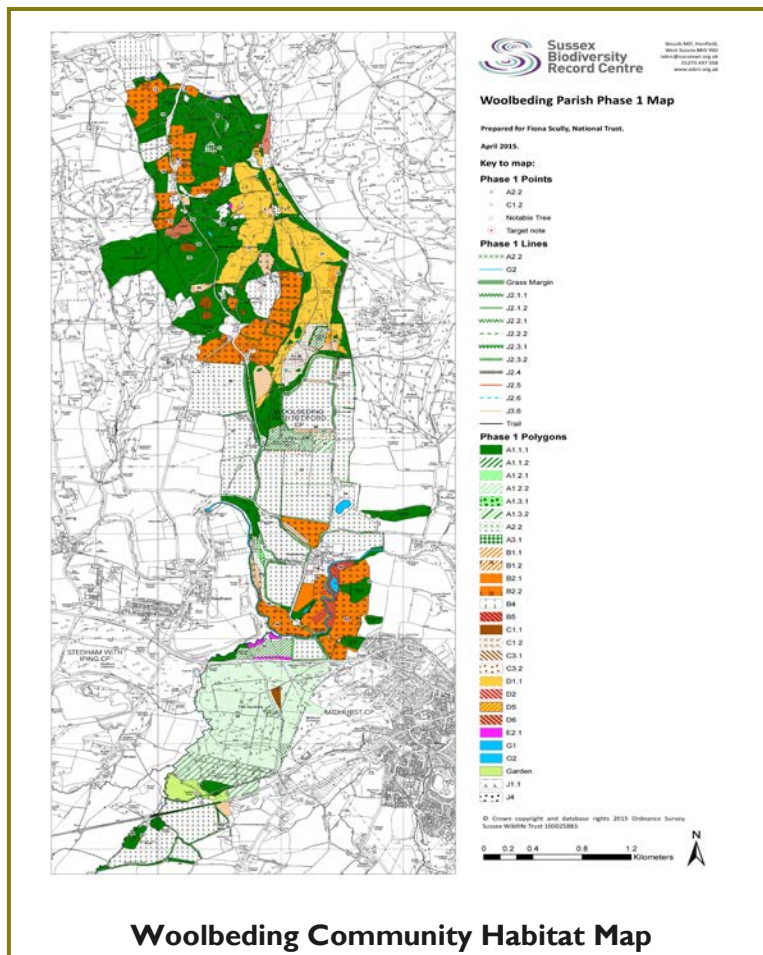
The outcome

The project started in early January 2013 and the map was finished in April 2015. It is intended that a small booklet will be produced to show the findings in the near future.

The project enabled many of the residents from Woolbeding to learn more about the habitats and wildlife in their parish.

The project gave the community the opportunity to meet conservation recorders covering a wide range of species like flowers, birds, mammals, bats, spiders, dragonflies, mosses and algae.

The project has empowered a number of the residents who are now able to email many new records of species that can be shared by the Record Office and Planning.



The future

The community have benefitted from participating in this project by learning about the habitats and many species that are found within the parish. Based within this experience members have now highlighted a number of future projects that would also benefit the area e.g. hedge and tree planting, and heath creation.

The project has also highlighted a future need to do extra surveys such as an invasive plant map including Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed.

The project is not going to end here, the community group intends to produce a booklet telling the story of how they went about creating the map and how it has empowered them to know more about what exists in the parish and carry out further community mapping surveys.

The Community Habitat Mapping Project is a useful tool that can be replicated in other locations and for any development ideas happening in the parish for the future.

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