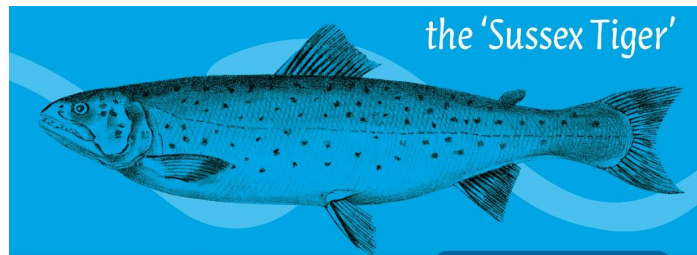


## **Saving the Sussex Sea Trout in Cooksbridge**



Within the narrow tributaries of the River Ouse lives and breeds a magnificent creature that has been present in North West Europe for over half a million years. Before the end of the last ice age, when hunter gatherers walked the Sussex landscape, the Sussex sea trout inhabited the Northend stream, creating spawning and nursery grounds in the chalk-fed stream. For thousands of years, since long before the neighbouring village of Cooksbridge even existed, this genetically unique fish has been repeating its cycle of spawning, swimming into the Ouse and out to sea, only to return after a couple of years, migrating back to this tranquil inland stream to repeat the cycle, more often than not to exactly the spot where it spawned itself. Creating nests or “redds” in the gravels and leaping over obstacles with its impressively powerful tail, the Sussex sea trout is the biggest in the country and mightiest species in the Ouse. This river royalty is now facing possible extinction due to the threat of development next to its spawning and juvenile nursery grounds in Cooksbridge.

[The Ouse Charter](#) covers not only the river but the species and tributaries of the river too, and the Northend Stream is of particular importance in these respects. It is the first significant spawning stream encountered by sea trout returning from the sea, meaning less stress for both upstream migration of adults and downstream migration of juveniles. The freshwater stretches of the River Ouse further upstream have multiple weirs, which hinder upstream migration. The Northend stream is downstream from these and is unusual in not having any significant settlement or built development from its spring all the way to the Ouse. All these factors contribute to the sea trout in the Northend Stream having higher survival rates. Protection of this resilience and genetic diversity, particularly in the face of climate change, has been underlined by the Wild Trout Trust as vitally important for the survival of the species and our native biodiversity.

The major sea trout spawning areas of the Northend stream are directly in front of a proposed development site. Cala Homes is proposing to build 151 houses adjacent to the precious Northend Stream, including frontage right on this crucial spawning section of the stream. This brings immediate and potentially catastrophic threats from pollution from building works including silting and suffocating the eggs, fry and parr (young fish), toxic run-off from roads and the more than 300 proposed parking spaces, invasive species, poaching, littering and disturbance from humans and pets.

Modern sustainable urban drainage systems for new housing on those slopes will be proposed, with all its corollaries of settlement ponds. Mitigations will be proposed to protect housing from flooding. The stream on the other hand needs to flood as part of its ecological cycle. What is more, in these times of service breakdown, the adequacy and permanence of water management measures are very much in doubt. Funding is lacking and the political will to protect nature cannot be relied upon.

There are already huge pressures on the sea trout. Water supply and water infrastructure here in the South East are in a dire state. The Environment Agency data shows that 87% of

catchments are now below normal to exceptionally low levels. The National Drought Group has predicted that by 2055, England will need to find an additional 5 billion litres of water a day to meet demand. This water crisis is expressed locally by greatly increased pollution levels, low flows, warming summer waters, increased extraction, the drying out of head streams and spawning gravels, deoxygenation, erosion of redds (nests) by repeated major rainfall spating, and damage and breakdown of water infrastructure. Wildlife in the river and streams is suffocating. To make matters even worse, Cooksbridge already has a terribly stressed wastewater system with significant sewage spills into the village and directly into the Northend stream. Hundreds more people would be relying on the sewage system and Southern Water has no plans to upgrade this facility.

**What is to be done?** As the sea trout silently moves along the Northend stream, finding water levels, water quality and oxygen levels increasingly difficult, local people are calling for the implementation of the commitments in the Ouse Charter and environmental legislation to protect the stream and its magnificent ancient inhabitants. Conservation groups are united in their opposition to the proposals. Objections have been submitted by Love Our Ouse, the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Hamsey Parish Council, Don't Urbanise Hamsey, The Bevern, North End and Ouse Conservation Society and the Ouse Angling Preservation Society to mention but a few, and a robust report by the Wild Trout Trust has underlined the importance of protecting the stream for the Sussex sea trout's survival.

An expert panel chaired by Dr Will Lock of the University of Sussex drew crowds earlier this month to listen to presentations from Love Our Ouse, the Ouse Angling Preservation Society and author and naturalist Dave Bangs. The plight of the stream was also the subject of a Love Our Ouse Interspecies Council at a recent gathering of parish councils and further action is planned to raise the alarm about the existential threat to the magnificent Sussex sea trout.

The National Planning Policy Framework requires planning decisions to prevent new development from contributing to unacceptable levels of water pollution, to safeguard river catchments, and to ensure that adequate wastewater and water supply infrastructure is in place ahead of occupation. The current evidence base demonstrates that this test has not been met. Development would also be very likely to adversely affect the irreplaceable ghyll woodland on the stream, affecting its microclimate, soil moisture regime, and species composition, including its ground flora and invertebrate communities which exist in symbiosis with the stream and the sea trout.

On a positive note, the nationally mandated [East Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#) (LNRS), required under the Environment Act of 2021, has determined that the Sussex sea trout is a priority species for conservation and recovery in our county. Building on its prime spawning grounds would not appear to be compatible with this urgent priority.

Meanwhile [Lewes District Council](#) is to be congratulated of course for being the first local authority in the country to support a charter of rights for a river. This states amongst other things that the river and its tributaries have the right to exist in their natural state, be free from pollution and have natural biodiversity, aka the sea trout. LDC's Local Plan Core Policies on Natural Environment and Landscape, Flood Risk and Water Management and Historic Environment collectively require any development to protect river corridors, avoid deterioration of water quality, conserve irreplaceable habitats, and safeguard landscape and heritage assets. On these grounds alone the housing application should be rejected as unsound in planning terms. An opportunity now to demonstrate that actions follow words

and values and commitments are reflected in decisions. The outcome for the Sussex sea trout could not be more existential.

By Don't Urbanise Hamsey, July 2026

**View resources and the various objections to date at the Don't Urban Hamsey website. If you would like to respond directly to the planning application there's still time. Feel free to reference or use content from the responses so far.**

<https://www.donturbanisehamsey.org/ecology>

**Saving the Sussex Sea Trout meeting event presentation:**

[\*\*Saving the Sussex Sea Trout meeting event presentation\*\*](#)

[\*\*Saving the Sussex Sea Trout meeting panel notes\*\*](#)

**Lewes District planning portal:**

<https://planningpa.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/online-applications/simpleSearchResults.do?action=firstPage>

LW/25/0339 | The provision of 151 residential dwellings (Class C3) including 40% affordable housing and commercial floorspace provision (Class E), with public open space, soft and hard landscaping, play space, community orchard, vehicular access, car and cycle parking provision and associated infrastructure including SUDS provision | Land At Cooksbridge Road Cooksbridge East Sussex