



Developing a Green Infrastructure Approach for the South Downs National Park

Circulation and Validation of Access Network and Accessible Natural Greenspace Study

Findings Report

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Produced for the South Downs National Park Authority by Associates from the Environment X Change.



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Introduction

In Spring 2013, the South Downs National Park Authority commissioned work to explore further a Green Infrastructure approach for the South Downs and to prepare an Access Network and Accessible Natural Greenspace Study. The Study provides evidence to support the South Downs National Park Management Plan and emerging Local Plan, analysing the access network and elements of the Green Infrastructure network in the South Downs.

The draft report was completed in November 2013 and has been circulated for comments to interested officers, members and stakeholders. From 10th January 2014 – 14th February 2014 the South Downs National Park Authority ran a questionnaire to validate the report data, collect further relevant information and gauge interest in future partnership working to develop a Green Infrastructure approach.

This report sets out the results of the questionnaire, the overall findings and views of stakeholders on the way forward for a strategic Green Infrastructure approach for the South Downs National Park and surrounding area.

The Access Network and Accessible Natural Greenspace Study

The Study analyses the access network and provision of greenspace in the South Downs National Park and adjoining areas. The Study focuses primarily on one of the elements of the total Green Infrastructure resource; the access components and, in particular, accessible natural greenspace (ANG).

The brief for the Study required analyses to be carried out across several areas:

- ANG provision and how well Natural England's ANG standards are met;
- Health and other socio-economic factors in relation to ANG provision;
- Public rights of way density and connectivity;
- Public transport links with destinations;
- Main development areas; their location, the cross boundary effects and links with ANG provision;
- Identifying biodiversity sites which are potentially sensitive to recreational pressure;
- Assessment of how approaches taken by the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) could inform decisions on strategic Green Infrastructure provision for the National Park.

The study area comprises of the South Downs National Park, plus the 'core area' local authorities of Adur and Worthing, Arun, Brighton and Hove, Chichester, Eastbourne, East Hampshire, Horsham, Lewes, Mid Sussex and Winchester. Around this core area, a buffer of 10km was also incorporated in order to identify cross-boundary issues and effects.

The Study comprises of three documents:

- Part 1 Main Report - provides a strategic overview of the access network and ANG across the South Downs National Park;
- Part 2 Supporting Information - provides analyses of the district authorities of the study area;
- Part 3 Appendix - contains further methodology and data.

The Main Report outlines a number of key recommendations centred on developing a Green Infrastructure approach for the South Downs National Park. The South Downs National Park Authority now want to build on the evidence base developed in this Study and draw this together with other local Green Infrastructure strategies and objectives, to develop a structured, evidence-based Green Infrastructure approach.

The National Park Authority could, with the support of the South Downs Partnership, be well placed to lead the development of the sub-regional approach and bring together existing county and district Green Infrastructure networks and relevant partnerships. The nature of this approach could range from formal arrangements for green infrastructure resourcing for the sub-region of the National Park and surrounding buffer area to a less formal agreement to develop a Green Infrastructure Strategy to which all parties could commit with collaboration on delivery of Green Infrastructure projects that are taken forward via existing partnerships.

The approach would also include taking a National Park-wide view of Green Infrastructure policy and planning, targeting delivery to where it is needed and identifying funding opportunities ‘

Views on the draft Study and recommendations are now sought to validate the work and gauge the interest amongst partners to develop a South Downs Green Infrastructure approach.

The Brief for the Findings Report

The brief was to compile and distribute a questionnaire to gain a better understanding of local partners' views on the consultation draft of the Access Network and Accessible Natural Greenspace Study and to identify the scope and commitment for future partnership working to deliver a Green Infrastructure approach for the South Downs and surrounding area.

Consultants would:

- Compile and distribute a questionnaire;
- Report responses and analyse results;
- Investigate the way forward by assessing support for a Green Infrastructure approach for the South Downs National Park;
- Ascertain if there is a local appetite for joint working on a Park-wide Green Infrastructure Strategy and assess the role that the South Downs National Park Authority could take in this.

The Methodology

After discussions with the South Downs National Park Authority, it was agreed not to carry out a full consultation on the Study, but to use a short questionnaire to collect data and views and gain a better understanding of local partners' responses to the draft of the Access Network and Accessible Natural Greenspace Study. The questionnaire was circulated to members and officers of the South Downs National Park Authority, the South Downs Partnership, the South Downs Local Access Forum, interested officers of local authorities and key stakeholders to gauge reaction to the recommendations in the Study and get feedback on proposals for a way forward.

A supporting letter with a link to a questionnaire via Survey Monkey, and a link to the three Study reports on the South Downs National Park Authority website was sent to 104 people on the contact database on 10th January 2014. Consultees were given until the 7th February 2014 to provide their responses. In a small number of exceptional circumstances consultees were given an extension to the deadline until the 14th February 2014.

A reminder email was sent to all those that had not replied or who had not fully completed the questionnaire on 30th January 2014.

The Findings

Analysis of the findings has been divided into three parts, as identified in the questionnaire:

- Part 1: The Response (About You);
- Part 2: Access and Accessible Natural Greenspace Study;
- Part 3: The Way Forward.

A detailed list of all the responses to the individual questions can be found in the Appendix Report – Full Survey of Responses, along with further analysis work and relevant background information. A spreadsheet of all the responses received is also available.

Part 1: The Response (About You)

In total 47 responses were received, of which 6 were removed as they did not answer any questions or only provided one answer that was of no value to the findings of the report. Of the remaining 41 responses, 40 were received via Survey Monkey and 1 via email. 3 additional emails were also received with supporting information, which were manually added to that respondent's Survey Monkey response.

Question 1 - 'Please provide your name, organisation you represent, job title / role and email address'

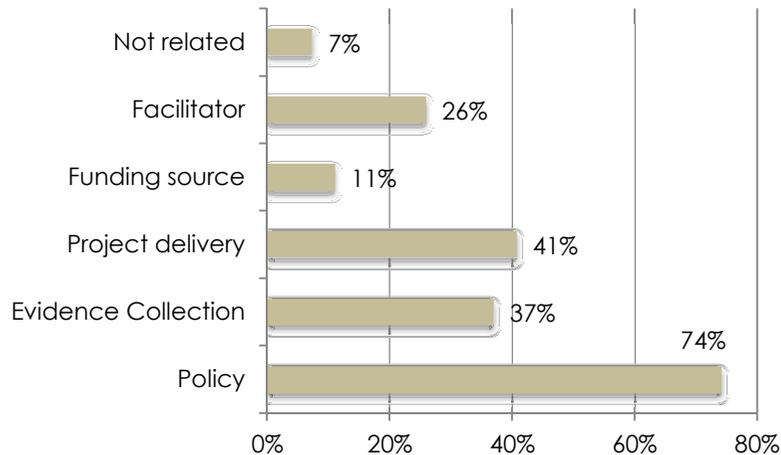
Responses were divided across the organisations as follows:

Organisation	Number	Response %
South Downs Members	3	7.32
South Downs Partnership	9	22.00
South Downs National Park Authority	2	4.88
Local Authorities	11	26.83
South Downs Local Access Forum	5	12.00
Non Government Organisation (NGOs)	4	9.76
Unknown	7	17.07
Total responses	41	

Although not large, this is a reasonable level of response for a survey of this type, with a 39% response rate. It is also a good representative sample across all the organisations consulted. The largest response rates were from local authorities (almost 27%) and the South Downs Partnership (22%).

Question 2 - 'What is the focus of your work in relation to Green Infrastructure?'

Responses received in answer to this question are shown below:



Responses were received from local authority officers in policy, community planning and evidence gathering, professionals in project delivery, stakeholders, such as landowners and land managers, user groups and amenity societies as well as members of the South Downs National Park Authority and the South Downs Partnership.

Fewer respondents focused on funding or facilitation and two said that their work was unrelated to Green Infrastructure.

A good cross-section of officers, members and stakeholders involved in Green Infrastructure responded to the questionnaire.

Question 3 - 'Please give details of any Green Infrastructure work / projects you are currently / will be working on.'

In the survey respondents were asked to identify any Green Infrastructure work that they were involved in. Respondents provided information on a wide variety of projects and related work, which are listed in the Appendix – Full Survey Results.

Part 2: Access Network and Accessible Natural Greenspace Study

Questions 4: 'Are there any fundamental inaccuracies or specific errors in the Study that you would like to draw our attention to?'

Question 5: 'Are there any omissions in the data that would assist the evidence base? Could you suggest other data sets that should be collected and used for analysis?'

'This comprehensive study provides a wealth of data to help and direct the route of GI in this area' (unknown respondent).

Respondents were asked to provide comments on any fundamental inaccuracies in the Study and if there were any omissions in the data that would assist the evidence base. Detailed comments are set out in the Appendix, although the following text summarises general comments in relation to questions 4 and 5.

In general respondents were content with the accuracy of the report, and considered it acceptable as a high-level strategic document. The majority of respondents thought it was a very good comprehensive report.

The few issues identified mostly related to clarification of data figures and mapping and are listed in the Appendix. A response has been provided on how these comments need to be managed and recommendations for further actions are outlined in the Recommendations section of this report.

The ANG Study falls somewhere between an access study and a Green Infrastructure Study. There were therefore some comments around the report not being sufficiently Green Infrastructure focused or not including the wider Green Infrastructure benefits to the economy, flood alleviation and resilience to climate change. Other respondents wanted more detail on permissive access or greater access analyses (the limitations of using ANG are explained in the Study). Some of these responses were due to not fully understanding the limitations in the scope of the report, coupled with the particular background and interests of the consultees. Nevertheless these comments are useful and will be considered in the next stage of the Green Infrastructure work, if the recommendations are supported.

There were, however, some points, which warrant further discussion:

- Data on housing allocations were collated in March, April and May 2013. The figures presented in the report were accurate at this time. It was discussed with the South Downs National Park Authority that these figures were likely to change as several of the local authorities were in the process of developing their Local Plans/Core Strategies and that these data would need to be periodically updated for accuracy. Although the figures will inevitably change they do give an indication of the level of development pressure in the area. Specific detail on housing data is not required for this strategic study and changes to the figures will require further detailed research and changes to analyses and

mapping, which will require the allocation of further resources.

- There were a small number of comments made about specific sites which respondents believed should have been included in the dataset. All of the ANG sites were checked with local authority representatives and determined by them to be accurate. Data was brought up-to-date and proofed as far as possible. The Natural England ANG criteria used is fairly restrictive and it is not clear without further investigation whether any of the sites highlighted by respondents would actually fit the ANG criteria.
- The following points in relation to taking forward any future Green Infrastructure Strategy are discussed in the recommendations section:
 - The need for local level data-proofing of the full Green Infrastructure dataset used in any future Green Infrastructure Strategy;
 - The need to adopt a more inclusive definition of accessible sites. Several comments were made regarding sites which had access at certain times (e.g. army land in East Hampshire), or sites which were accessible by rights of way.

Question 6 'What are your views on the recommendations outlined in the Study?'

Respondents were asked for their view on the Study's recommendations. A summary of the findings are listed below:

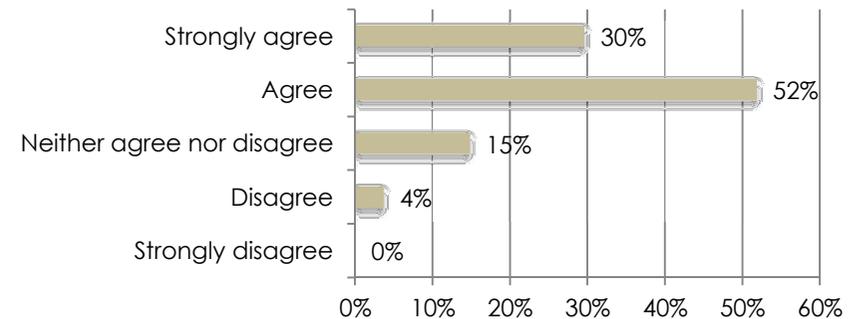
- Most people accepted the report was a high level strategic Study, which would serve as an evidence base for the South Downs National Park Management Plan and Local Plan;
- There was strong support for the recommendations especially the production and delivery of a South Downs National Park led sub-regional Green Infrastructure Strategy to give a consistent approach to Green Infrastructure;
- The eleven Local Authorities who responded mostly agreed that it is important to develop a sub-regional Green Infrastructure approach;
- Horsham, Arun and Chichester District Councils are supportive of the recommendations and under the Duty to Cooperate wish to work with the South Downs National Park Authority to develop a Green Infrastructure Strategy;
- Adur and Worthing support a sub-regional Green Infrastructure approach and feel it is important to have Green Infrastructure work at a local level to guide potential development, inform emerging policy documents such as local plans and housing review work;
- Local authorities such as Arun, Chichester, Adur and Worthing welcome discussions as to how the strategic Green Infrastructure study translates to the local level and works across administrative borders;
- Many local authorities intend to use section 106 and CIL funding to support Green Infrastructure projects. They highlight the need to bring in additional funding as there are insufficient resources to develop Green Infrastructure in the region;
- West Sussex County Council acknowledge that Green Infrastructure is a shared asset that needs to be taken forward in partnership specifically working with the South Downs Way Ahead NIA, Local Nature Partnership, the Sussex Biodiversity Records Office and local authority Green Infrastructure partnerships. However, they consider the production of supplementary planning guidance documents as a low priority as many Local Development Frameworks and emerging Local Plans have already produced Green Infrastructure policies and strategies;
- Hampshire County Council wanted to ensure there was no duplication with the aims and objectives of the South Downs National Park Management Plan and clarity was needed with the Green Infrastructure Strategy and South Downs National Park Management Plan delivery plans;
- South Downs National Park officers agreed to the thrust of the work but Phil Belden was concerned 'not to gather more evidence at the expense of action on the ground. The South Downs National Park Authority needs to be seen to deliver and Green Infrastructure projects can be delivered through the South Downs National Park Management Plan';
- Amenity societies are also supportive and the South Downs Society commented that it found the report generally sound incorporating strategy, targets, planning, funding delivery and maintenance. However, they highlight that it is important to consider the people using Green Infrastructure as well as protecting and maintaining the physical infrastructure;

- Many respondents saw it as a framework for future practical proposals and looked forward to seeing projects included in local delivery plans;
- User groups were keen to rapidly progress to a Green Infrastructure delivery plan .One in particular wanted to use the delivery plan to address the shortfall in Public Rights of Way in some areas;
- Alison Tingley, representing some Land managers and landowners are keen for the South Downs National Park to support payments and delivery of ecosystem services. It was requested that an additional recommendation to increase ANG would be to investigate creating a scheme to pay for the long-term provision of permissive paths;
- Overall the recommendations of the Study were strongly supported.

Part 3: The Way Forward

Question 7 -'Do you think a South Downs National Park-wide Green Infrastructure approach is the way forward?'

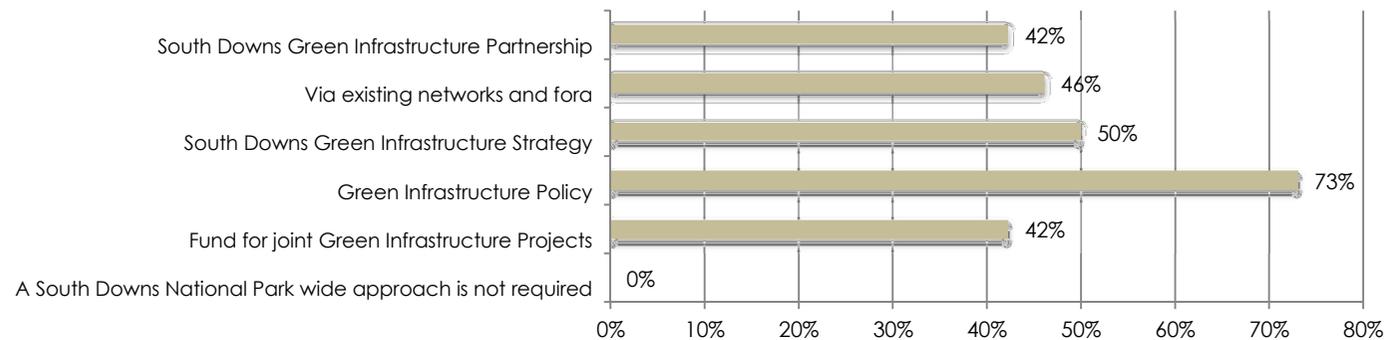
Responses received in answer to this question are shown below:



81% of respondents said they strongly agree or agree to take a South Downs National Park-wide Green Infrastructure approach and no one disagreed.

Question 8 'How should we take this Green Infrastructure work forward?'

Responses received in answer to this question are shown below:



An overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that a sub-regional Green Infrastructure approach for the South Downs National Park is needed. It was agreed that a Green Infrastructure approach will need to go beyond the National Park and its administrative boundaries to link with the more developed adjacent urban fringe areas.

The South Downs Green Infrastructure approach should be taken forward by a partnership of local authorities, statutory bodies, amenity societies, user groups and stakeholders. Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Nature Partnerships as well as existing Green Infrastructure Partnerships should be key to developing an appropriate approach for the South Downs. Some respondents think there needs to be more discussion with the relevant interested parties to agree the best way forward and suggest a sub group should be set up to consider the options and recommend a structure.

The creation of a South Downs Green Infrastructure Partnership was also supported provided there was no duplication with existing Green Infrastructure networks and fora. All partnership groups should be complimentary and not duplicate work or compete for resources.

' The existing county GI partnerships could be used instead of forming new County subgroups so that Local authorities and various 'user groups' can easily access their own relevant GI information' (Mid-Sussex District Council).

There was strong support for the development of a South Downs Green Infrastructure Strategy. Some local authorities suggested a borough/district scale approach should be developed once the sub-regional strategy and Green Infrastructure assessments have been completed.

A South Downs Green Infrastructure Strategy would need to have a clear vision and incorporate a realistic delivery plan. It was felt too early to consider Green Infrastructure funding which should be discussed by the constituent bodies involved. One respondent said the application of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to deliver Green Infrastructure benefits, and the potential of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Local Economic Partnership (LEP) funding should not be underestimated in this context.

There was also very strong support for the development of a strategic Green Infrastructure policy, with just over 73% of responses indicating this was one of their preferred options.

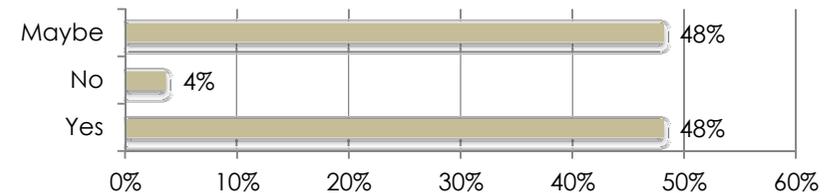
42% of respondents supported delivery of a Green Infrastructure approach via a new South Downs Green Infrastructure Partnership, while 46% were content with using existing networks and fora.

Finally respondents felt it was important to get:

"Buy-in" from all the key decision-makers, developers and stakeholders and to undertake a promotional strategy to get key people and organisations to fully appreciate the value of Green Infrastructure' (South Downs National Park Authority).

Question 9 'Would your organisation be prepared to be part of a South Downs Green Infrastructure Partnership / South Downs Partnership Green Infrastructure Sub Group?'

Responses received in answer to this question are shown below:



The majority of respondents indicated that they would consider being part of a South Downs Green Infrastructure Partnership. 48% definitely wanted to be part of a partnership and only 4% said they did not have the time or resources to get directly involved.

Concern was also raised that any subgroups should work in harmony and not duplicate the existing East Sussex and West Sussex Green Infrastructure Partnerships.

This positive response clearly shows there is an appetite for further discussion to and take forward a sub-regional Green Infrastructure approach.

Question 10 – 'Would you be happy for us to contact you again about your responses above?'

90% of the respondents were happy to be consulted further.

Conclusion

There was a reasonable response to the survey with a 39% response rate, which enabled us to gather the views from a wide range of consultees. There was a good representative sample of responses from across all the consultee organisations received from officers, members, key stakeholders and volunteers.

The quality of responses was generally good with useful in depth comments on the detail of the report as well as the way forward for a South Downs Green Infrastructure Approach. We are satisfied we have been able to collect stakeholders views and gauge opinion on the ANG report and Way Forward for a South Downs Green Infrastructure Approach.

With regard to the Study, it can be concluded that, in general respondents, were content with the accuracy of the report and considered it acceptable as a high level strategic document. The majority of respondents thought it was a very good comprehensive document.

In assessing the responses it can also be concluded that there is a clear local appetite for joint working. General opinion amongst consultees supports the South Downs National Park Authority taking a leading role in driving forward a Green Infrastructure approach for the South Downs and surrounding area.

There was similar strong support for the development of a South Downs Green Infrastructure Strategy and very strong support for a sub regional Green Infrastructure policy.

Recommendations

The responses from the questionnaire have clearly provided a better understanding of local partners' views on the consultation draft of the Access Network and Accessible Natural Greenspace Study and have demonstrated that there is a strong local appetite for a South Downs National Park-wide Green Infrastructure approach.

A number of recommendations should now be considered in order to take forward both elements of work.

Recommendations on Phase 1 ANG and Access Network Study

Undertake Small Amendments to the Study Document

There were several minor changes to be made to the report, which are indicated in the comments column of 'Responses to Q4 and Q5' in the Appendix.

Publish Reporting with the Current Housing Allocation

Data on housing allocations were collated in March, April and May 2013. The figures presented in the report were accurate at this time.

These figures can be amended in line with the comments made in the consultation responses, but these will also become out of date in a short time-frame. Changes to update the figures will also require considerable alteration of mapping.

The mapping and data is an accurate record of housing allocations at the time of the research and provides an adequate spatial representation of the main areas of growth. The SDNPA should consider updating the data periodically.

Inclusion of Additional ANG Sites

There were a small number of comments made about specific sites which respondents believed should have been included in the dataset (although without further research it is not clear whether these would actually qualify as ANG). The mapping and analyses would not be greatly affected at a strategic scale by the inclusion of the sites highlighted as (possibly) missing. It would, however, have a greater impact at the district level. Several of the coastal authorities raised issues of sites which they believed should have been included (Adur, Worthing, Brighton). These local authorities have significant levels of housing to deliver and limited greenspace, therefore in terms of local plan making the inclusion of as many sites as possible is understandable.

It should be noted by the SDNPA that, in making the decision to research and include additional sites, such changes, even though minor, would require the wholesale re-mapping of the study and recalculating all data. It is considered that this would not be a cost-effective exercise to undertake for the strategic scale required by the South Downs National Park Authority. In addition, the inclusion of additional sites will, in any case, be taken forward in the production of the GI Strategy.

Undertake a Local Level Data-Proofing of the Full Green Infrastructure Dataset Required for a Green Infrastructure Strategy.

It would be highly beneficial to undertake a data-validation exercise to identify and work through, with local authorities, a complete dataset that could be used in preparing a Green Infrastructure Strategy for the South Downs National Park. This could

be done in face-to-face meetings with mapping provided. The local authorities could also cascade to Parishes and other groups.

Develop and Adopt a more Inclusive Definition of Accessible Sites

Several comments were made regarding sites, which had access at certain times (e.g. army land in East Hampshire), or sites, which were accessible by rights of way. In view of the duties of the National Park, any future Green Infrastructure Strategy should place an emphasis on conservation and accessibility of the Green Infrastructure resource. This may require a more bespoke approach to be devised to capture a range of categories of sites.

Addressing other Data Issues

A response has been provided to individual comments raised on specific aspects of the Study's data in the Appendix Report. In order to address many of these issues it is recommended that should a Phase 2 Green Infrastructure Strategy be taken forward the issues would be address as part of that work. This could include checking data at a local level alongside other Green Infrastructure datasets; refinement of sites and considering a more complete set of accessible greenspace datasets. This is discussed further below.

Produce a User-Friendly Executive Summary Document

The Study is currently a technical report, but a number of respondents (South Downs National Park Authority officers) suggested that a 'user-friendly' executive summary of the Study would be useful, providing key facts and issues and an action plan or set of future proposals.

Main Recommendations: Taking Forward Green Infrastructure in the South Downs National Park

Responses, in general, strongly support the Study's recommendations and this report recommends that the South Downs National Park Authority, now actively progresses these.

In summary these are to:

- Work with partners to develop a sub-regional Green Infrastructure Approach that will guide and coordinate the gathering of further evidence for the preparation of plans, policies and strategies relating to Green Infrastructure at a sub regional, county, district and local level;
- The South Downs National Park Authority to lead and facilitate/ coordinate the development of a sub regional approach, bringing together existing county and district Green infrastructure networks and relevant partners and partnerships;
- The South Downs National Park Authority to develop with partners a strategic Green Infrastructure Strategy;
- Consider a wide range of delivery and funding options including planning conditions, special projects that draw external funding and local community action.

There are a number of key steps that are required in order to move forward.

Organise a one day Facilitated Scoping Workshop

89% of respondents said yes and maybe to being part of a Green Infrastructure Partnership / Sub Group. These people should be brought together in a one day workshop to further develop a way forward for a South Downs Green Infrastructure approach. The purpose of this workshop would be to present the findings of the ANG Study and questionnaire; discuss the approach options in further detail; agree key partners and stakeholders; agree a governance model and timescale for the development of a South Downs Green Infrastructure Strategy. Other issues raised by respondents, such as the role of the South Downs Way Ahead Nature Improvement Area (NIA) (Brighton and Hove City Council), a clearer understanding of Green Infrastructure (South Downs National Park member), the role of ecosystem services (Natural England) and the need to prevent duplication of work (Hampshire County Council) could all be explored further at the workshop.

Address Issue of Environmental Economics

A number of responses focused on the need to identify socio economic links that access to greenspace provides and the adoption of a Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) approach (South Downs Land Managers Group, South Downs National Park Authority and Natural England).

We understand the National Park Authority is developing a pilot approach to Ecosystems Services ('Ecoserve' initiative), and is gathering data for this purpose. A Green Infrastructure Strategy may be broadened by the Ecoserve approach, but some attention should be given to the different aims of these initiatives, as well as the typologies and data sets required for each exercise. This will ensure that effort is not duplicated, and maximum value is obtained from a more comprehensive approach.