



# ACCESSIBLE NATURAL GREENSPACE IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY



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## INTRODUCTION

**In 2013, the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) carried out a study to better understand how well the green open access areas of the National Park serve people living in and around it, and the potential pressures on this resource. This summary sets out the key findings.**

The study supports both the emerging Local Plan and the delivery of policies contained within the National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP).

The findings will help us to work with our partners to prioritise resources on the areas of greatest need and opportunity. We will continue to build on this evidence base

### ACCESS TO THE NATIONAL PARK

The South Downs is the most populated National Park, with 112,000 people living within it and nearly 5 million within 5km of its boundary. Being able to access the National Park for enjoyment

and recreation is therefore important to many people.

Connecting people with the special landscape of the National Park is a high priority for us. We want everyone, regardless of health, income, physical ability or ethnicity, to have the opportunity to visit the National Park and to understand and enjoy its special qualities. We are also working to ensure that this access is sustainable and that the qualities of the National Park are undiminished. Sustainable transport, including improvements to the cycling network and disabled access, are important priorities. In partnership with the highways authorities, transport operators, landowners and other providers, we are working to provide high-quality access and sustainable transport networks to serve residents and visitors.

There are many places and ways in which people can access the National Park. We have a 3,300km rights of way network, the most extensive in a UK National Park, which can be enjoyed on foot, bicycle and horseback; this, together with additional cycle routes connect accessible greenspaces including the Heritage coast. There are very few areas that lack both local accessible greenspace and public rights of way. Public rights of way provide a valuable means of enjoying the National Park even when passing through countryside that has no public access either side of the linear route.

Enjoyment of the outdoors brings many health and well-being benefits. However, those communities where health is poorest often do not have areas of accessible greenspace close to where they live in order to gain those benefits.

The study has helped to build our understanding of the places, routes and green spaces available for access in and around the National Park. It also shows how these relate to communities and their needs and the potential future pressures on them.

## AT A LANDSCAPE SCALE – SUSTAINABLY

The South Downs National Park is a thriving, living landscape. We are committed to taking forward our plans and policies across the whole landscape of the South Downs; particularly as we plan for and influence what activities occur where, through the emerging Local Plan.

Sustainable development<sup>1</sup> underpins the emerging Local Plan and the PMP and to achieve it we are adopting an ‘ecosystems approach’ in our policies and delivery programmes. This integrates management of the land, water and living resources to achieve a sustainable balance. An ecosystems approach delivers cost-effective and viable solutions for land management as it provides multiple benefits for society, such as improved biodiversity, reduced flood risk, less soil erosion and improved air and water quality.

The principles of green infrastructure planning will be a key delivery mechanism to achieve both spatial planning and an ecosystems approach across the whole landscape of the National Park. The study has helped us to begin green infrastructure planning in the National Park.

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<sup>1</sup> Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland Commission).

## WHAT IS GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE?

Green infrastructure is a network of high quality natural spaces (green and blue) which fulfil many different functions.

Green spaces can be man made such as green roofs or sports pitches, semi natural such as woodland plantations or natural e.g. heathland and ancient woodland; they range widely in size and type.

Blue spaces include rivers, canals, lakes, ponds and estuaries.

Their wide use might include access, as in this study, or in supporting nature, the economy or other social benefits such as health and well-being. Planning where these spaces are and how they are connected can help maximise benefits to society. This study will help us to identify the greatest needs and opportunities for improvement.

## FORCES OF CHANGE

There are many external pressures for change requiring management if they are to positively influence the special qualities of the National Park. Visitor numbers, for example, have increased and this has the potential to lead to more pressure, particularly on those popular ‘honey pot’ sites.

Pressures also come from outside the National Park’s boundary, hence the wider catchment area for the study. It has helped to provide us with greater understanding of some of these pressures and how they interact.

## DELIVERING THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

Fundamental to the successful delivery of the shared vision for the National Park is the need for us to work through partnership; with a range of organisations, communities and individuals.

There are already many excellent projects which have been delivered with or by our partners and the case studies documented here showcase some of these.

The study is not purely an evidence base. It is vital that the understanding it has brought will lead to tangible improvements and more successful initiatives, partnerships and projects to address the issues and opportunities which have been identified.

## ABOUT THE STUDY

The study investigated how users of the National Park, both local residents and visitors, travel to, around and through the National Park using rights of way, public transport and cycle and other strategic linear routes. It has brought new understanding of the links between access and health, deprivation, future development and potential impacts on biodiversity.

As a first step in understanding green infrastructure in the National Park, the study also focussed on one particular type of greenspace; termed accessible natural greenspace.

## WHAT IS ACCESSIBLE NATURAL GREENSPACE?

Accessible natural greenspace is a type of greenspace where visitors can experience nature.

Examples include nature reserves, country parks, woodlands and downland, but they can include any spaces where there is a high amount of natural habitat. To be an 'accessible natural greenspace' there must be free access at all times.

The study had a wide area, covering the National Park and the whole of any district local authority partly within the National Park. We included all of Adur and Worthing, Arun, Brighton and Hove, Chichester, Eastbourne, East Hampshire, Horsham, Lewes, Mid Sussex, Wealden and Winchester districts. Around the outside of this area we added a further 10km area.

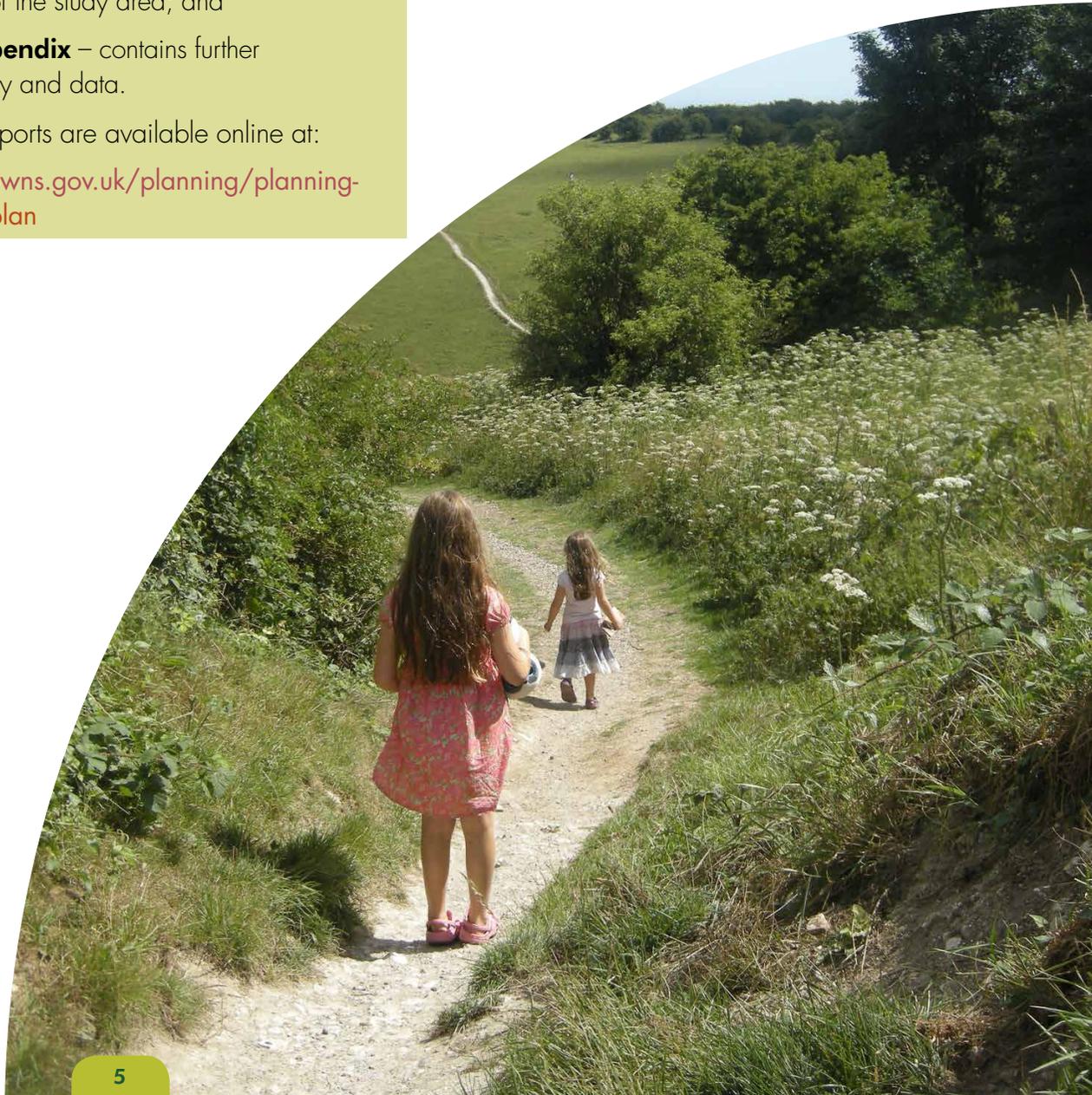
We used this large study area so that we could fully understand how the National Park fits in with its surrounding area and the larger centres of population which are adjacent to or within easy travelling distance of the National Park.

The full study is made up of three reports:

- **Part 1 Main Report** – this provides a strategic overview of the whole study area;
- **Part 2 Supporting Information** – this provides analyses for each of the district authorities of the study area; and
- **Part 3 Appendix** – contains further methodology and data.

All of these reports are available online at:

[www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/local-plan](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/local-plan)





# THE FINDINGS

## ACCESSIBLE NATURAL GREENSPACE

**These types of greenspace are important because they enable people to get close to the nature and landscapes of the South Downs. They are particularly valuable in urban areas and villages, as the ability to have contact with nature close to home has many benefits, including improvements to health, fitness and mental well-being.**

In recognition of the importance of these types of greenspace, Natural England, the government's nature conservation agency, developed a set of standards for the amount of accessible natural greenspace everyone should have close to where they live. In essence, the standards set out that people should have access to at least a small amount of natural greenspace within five minutes walk and that they should also be able to visit

larger sites, such as country parks, even if they need to travel further to reach them.

Greenspace within walking distance (i.e. 300m) and cycling distance (i.e. 2km) is particularly relevant, especially for promoting health.

The study has shown that meeting the standard of accessible natural greenspace within walking distance is particularly challenging. Even for the local authority area with the best access, Brighton and Hove, only 27 per cent of the population have access to an accessible natural greenspace site within 300m. In Arun, the local authority with the lowest scoring, only 4 per cent of the population have such local access; however, for Arun residents living in the South Downs National park the figure rises to 26 per cent.

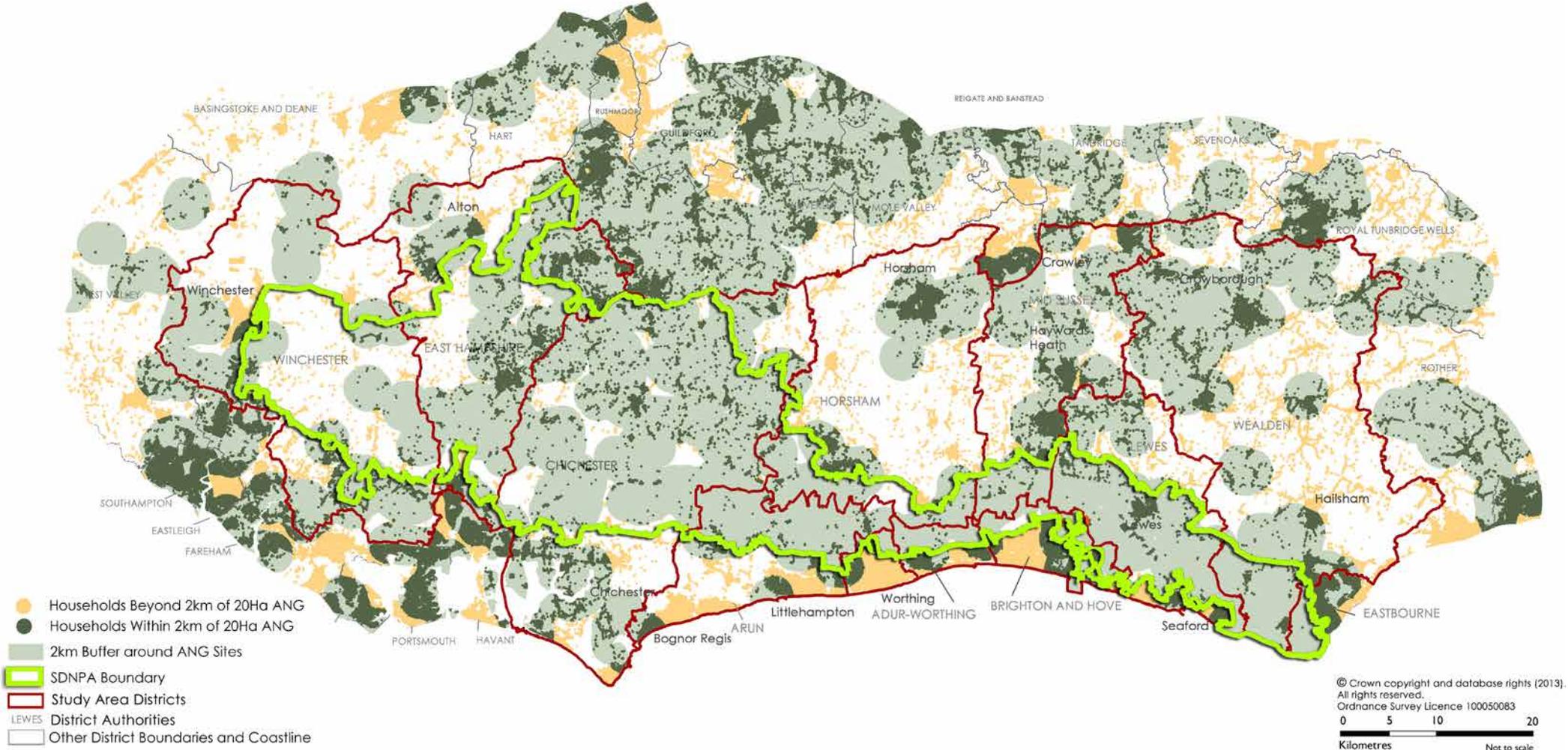
The situation improves, however, for sites within 2km and in most districts over two-thirds of residents enjoy such access. In Mid Sussex and East Hampshire, the highest scoring districts, 88 per cent of the population have access to accessible natural greenspace within 2km.

Natural England recommends that everyone should have:

- an accessible natural greenspace of at least 2 hectares in size, no more than 300 metres (5 minutes' walk) from home;
- at least one accessible 20 hectare natural greenspace within two kilometres of home;
- at least one accessible 100 hectare natural greenspace within five kilometres of home; and
- at least one accessible 500 hectare natural greenspace within ten kilometres of home..

There are 11 sites of the largest 500 + hectare category within the study area. However, only two, Seven Sisters Country Park & Friston Forest combined and Kingley Vale, are in the South Downs National Park. Not everyone has access to these sites within 10km, however, notably residents in the coastal local authorities of Adur, Worthing and Brighton as well as in Winchester local authority area. Other sites of less than 50 hectares are also important, forming large spaces where people can access nature.

# PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY DENSITY AND HOUSEHOLDS LACKING ACCESSIBLE NATURAL GREENSPACE WITHIN 300M



The study helps us to understand issues of supply and demand for accessible natural greenspace sites in relation to the size of population. For example, locations where there are only a few sites might be placed under more pressure, as residents in those areas will have fewer choices of places to visit. Chichester, for example, has a particularly good number of sites; whereas Winchester and Horsham local authorities have the fewest.

Where it is difficult to create new greenspace in existing urban areas, the quality of new and existing provision can be made a priority. For example, by identifying where existing pressures are greatest, planning authorities can give high priority to incorporating accessible greenspace into new housing developments and growth areas and improving access links for existing greenspace. The rights of way network becomes particularly important in providing access. Innovative approaches will be required to increase access, such as those being developed in Petersfield<sup>2</sup>.

Accessible natural greenspace can also be enhanced by improving the quantity and quality of natural areas within existing greenspaces, which could be particularly important for communities where the opportunities for providing new greenspace are limited. This would also help to increase the biodiversity value of the sites and

2 See the East Hampshire Green Infrastructure Strategy (2013)

the coherence of ecological networks, which are priorities for us.

## WOODLAND

Although some woodlands are classed as accessible natural greenspace, we wanted to know how much of the woodland in the study area is accessible to the public.

We found that both within the National Park and across the wider study area, a relatively small proportion of all woodland is open for public access.

There are real opportunities to increase access to smaller local woodland areas and larger sites.

This could be particularly useful in areas such as parts of Winchester district, the mid-western part of East Hampshire and southern parts of Chichester and Horsham local authority areas.

Woodland in some parts of the study area could also help to provide additional accessible sites to help reduce recreation pressure on more sensitive sites.

A helpful summary of the accessible natural greenspace provision across the study area can be found on p 45 of the Main Report:

[www.southdowns.gov.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/406013/CONSULTATION-DRAFT-Access-Network-and-ANG-Study-SDNPA-MAIN-REPORT-January-2014.pdf](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/406013/CONSULTATION-DRAFT-Access-Network-and-ANG-Study-SDNPA-MAIN-REPORT-January-2014.pdf)

## CASE STUDY

Buriton Chalk Pits Nature Reserve represents a success story for Buriton Parish Council in providing open access and effective management of semi-natural habitat in former chalk quarries. In 2007, when there had been a threat to close all public access to the site, the Parish Council launched an initiative, with support from East Hampshire District Council and Hampshire County Council who manage the Queen Elizabeth Country Park (QECP), and subsequently obtained a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to help look after the area. The site is now managed by local volunteers with assistance from QECP staff. A programme of walks and talks for those wishing to find out more about the natural and industrial history of the site is run by the Country Park and Buriton Village Association.



Given the close proximity to QECP, the site can relieve some of the pressure from that park. Its location at the intersection of the South Downs Way, Shipwrights Way and Monarchs Way also provides a great location to learn more about the industrial heritage and natural history of the South Downs.

## HEALTH AND SOCIO-ECONOMICS

The links between physical and mental health and access to the countryside and green spaces are now well known. The natural environment can help to reduce stress, anxiety and depression, can enhance social interaction and promote independent living, while providing space to improve and sustain increased physical activity.

Those with good access to greenspace live longer than those with no easy access to greenspace. Older people live longer where there are more parks and tree-lined streets for walking near their home and children's physical activity levels are higher when they live closer to parks, playgrounds, and recreation areas. Overall, better health is related to access to greenspace, regardless of socio-economic status.

In England, the most deprived communities are ten times less likely to live in the greenest areas.

In the study we mapped a range of health issues and socio-economic factors and compared them with the distribution of accessible natural greenspace.

We first used information on a range of health conditions which are linked most strongly to, or can be improved through, access to the natural environment. This included: life expectancy, levels of physical activity, heart disease, stroke, hip fractures, obesity and mental health.

	Actions on the part of health and well-being partnerships and other partners
<b>Scenario 1:</b> Where there is poor health but good levels of greenspace nearby.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote exercise in greenspaces, raising awareness of the benefits, e.g. health walks;</li> <li>• Reduce those barriers which stop people accessing the greenspace;</li> <li>• Invest in greenspaces to make them welcoming and attractive and improve their quality;</li> <li>• Link health services with greenspace use, for example GP referral.</li> </ul>
<b>Scenario 2:</b> Where there is poor health and a lack of nearby greenspace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan strategically to provide more greenspace close to people's homes;</li> <li>• Influence planning and green infrastructure development;</li> <li>• Promote green infrastructure as a recognised integral part of 'health service' provision, along-side surgeries, hospitals etc.;</li> <li>• Improve and promote public transport links to key greenspace sites, especially those with a range of facilities to support less confident countryside users.</li> </ul>

We mapped these using data on all the conditions which Natural England has combined to form a 'score' for each area based on how 'healthy' a population is.

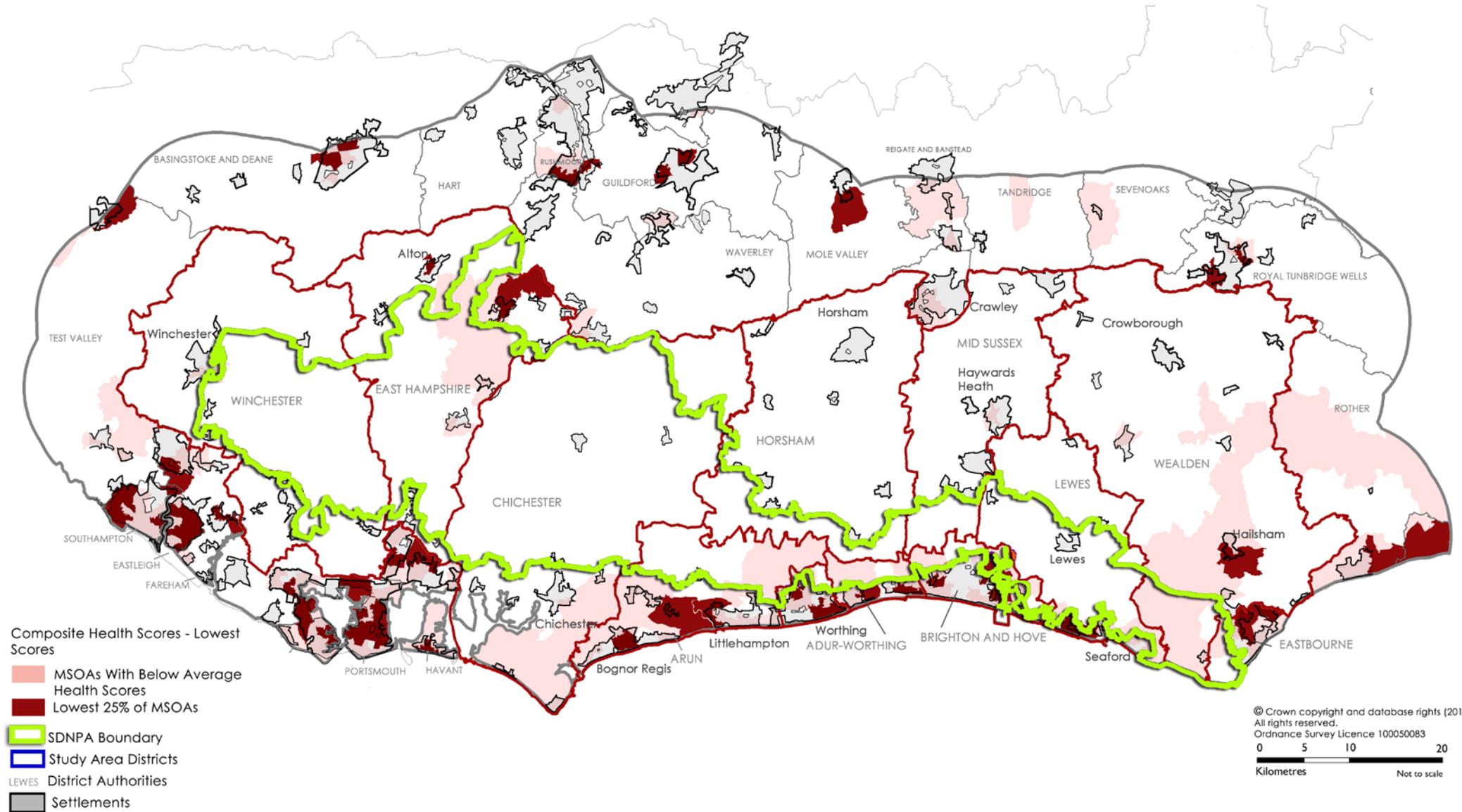
We also mapped information on general health, long-term health problems or disability and car or van ownership from the 2011 census, along with indices of multiple deprivation.<sup>3</sup>

We learnt that households with the poorest levels of health in all of the categories analysed are mostly in the coastal towns. There are also smaller areas of poorer health in parts of Winchester, Alton, Whitehill and Bordon, Haslemere, Hailsham and Eastbourne.

There is a strong overlap between areas that have the poorest levels of health and low levels of car ownership. Most of these areas also lack accessible natural greenspace and several are in areas in which further development is planned.

<sup>3</sup> A combination of measurements of the amount of deprivation in a population based on income, employment, health, education, housing, crime and living environment.

# AREAS WITH BELOW AVERAGE HEALTH, COMPOSITE HEALTH SCORE.



In areas where there is poorer health and lack of access to greenspace, action may be required to improve the quantity of all types of greenspaces, including accessible natural greenspace, as access to any greenspace is beneficial. There may be particular opportunities to do this in new developments where provision and access can form part of master-planning.

Some areas of poor health do also have adequate levels of accessible natural greenspace. As a National Park Authority we are exploring with other local authorities, health partners, community groups and non-governmental organisations how people could be encouraged to use these spaces more.

An example of this is the work the National Park Authority is supporting through the Sussex Community Development Association Health and Well-Being project. This aims to demonstrate, through pilot projects, how the health and well-being of residents living in and outside the National Park can be improved through encouraging use of the open space, tranquillity, breath-taking views and a range of healthy activities that the National Park has to offer. Partners will implement different approaches across a wide geographical area and independent evaluation of the projects will help to identify what activities are the most successful in improving the issues addressed.

We hope that further projects and partnerships between the SDNPA, health commissioners and practitioners and the voluntary and community sector groups will follow.

## CASE STUDY

South Downs Rural Outreach (SDRO) was set up by a group of people with mental health needs, with the support of Coastal West Sussex Mind, to provide opportunities for people with mental health needs to volunteer, train in woodland management skills, or simply to access the countryside and rural industries within a countryside setting. This has been possible with the support of the Barlavington Estate, which allows use of a small copse on their land. SDNPA Ranger, Graham West, has helped to put together a woodland management plan and leads the working parties in the woodland.

Here are comments from group members of what the project has meant to them:

*"At the age of 37, being part of SDRO is the first time I've felt comfortable with a whole group of people, as you feel that everyone understands you."*

*"As the agricultural community breaks up, SDRO gives back a sense of belonging to some people from that background."*

*"Coming from a town I have never had the chance to be in the woodlands. SDRO has made this happen for me."*



## LARGER-SCALE DEVELOPMENT

It is essential that we understand where the existing and future areas of population pressure will occur in and around the National Park. Population pressures arise from:

- inward migration;
- growth of existing communities; and
- visitors to the National Park, currently around 46 million visitor days per year.

Provision needs to be made for all of the above and with thoughtful planning, infrastructure and other facilities can serve the needs of both visitors and residents.

Information from the Local Planning Authorities on the location and size of the larger future housing sites (100+ houses) across the whole study area,<sup>4</sup> show that three areas in particular are likely to increase in size due to new housing:

- Horsham and Crawley;
- The coastal belt between Worthing and Brighton and Hove; and
- Fareham, Havant and Portsmouth.

<sup>4</sup> The Main Report from which this Non Technical Summary was written contains a snapshot for development based upon the best available information from Local Planning Authorities as the time of compilation (2012). These figures constantly change and have not therefore been updated. They are only intended to be indicative of where development pressures are being experienced.

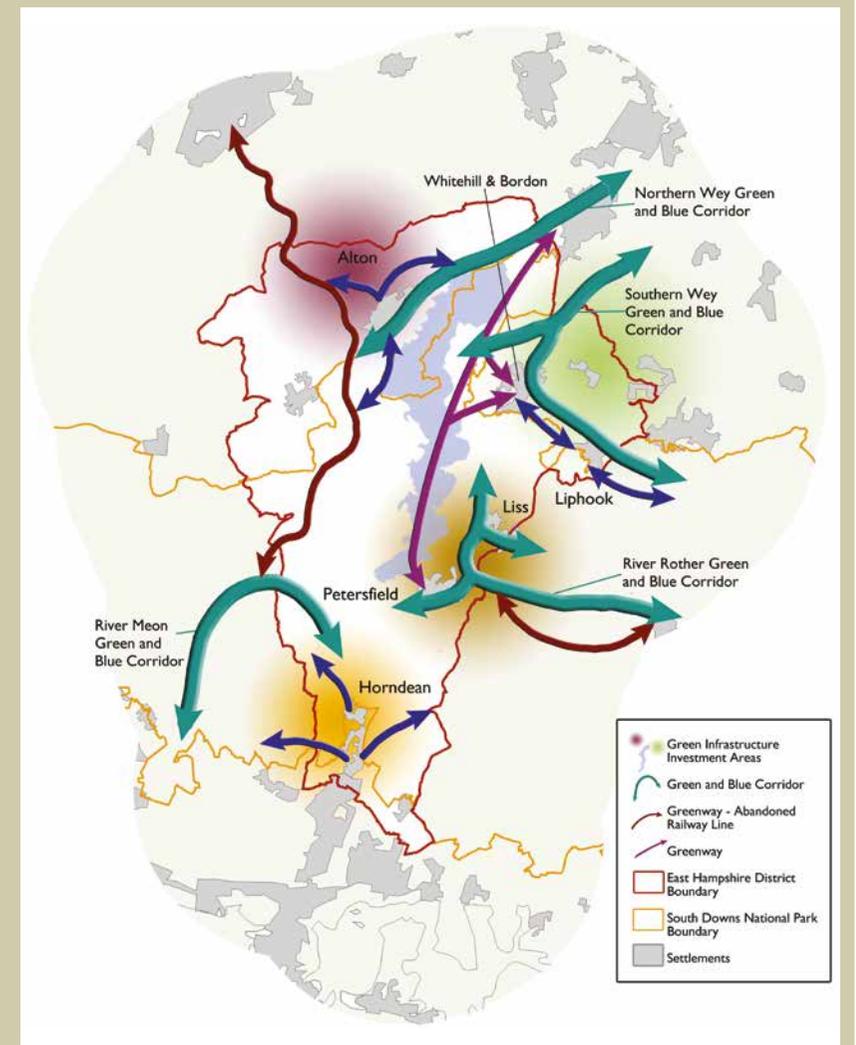
Other significant areas include:

- North east of East Hampshire District (generated primarily by Whitehill & Bordon);
- Aldershot and Basingstoke;
- Winchester;

- Eastbourne;
- Haywards Heath; and
- Chichester.

### CASE STUDY

Approximately 57 per cent of East Hampshire district lies within the South Downs National Park. The National Park Authority has worked with EHDC to develop a Joint Core Strategy to determine how development needs can be met for a growing population and an economy that embraces the unique landscapes and settlements of the National Park. A jointly produced Green Infrastructure Strategy has underpinned this work. This has identified priority areas and projects to improve green infrastructure and address existing pressures.



If the 5km area around a new major development only has a few accessible natural greenspace sites these could be put under increased pressure

We found that there is a lack of accessible greenspace across the whole coastal belt and significant amounts of new development planned. This makes greenspace sites in the National Park between Worthing and Brighton of great importance. Here, a number of greenspace sites fall within the catchments of several proposed development sites.

Given existing shortfalls in accessible natural greenspace provision new, larger scale developments need to incorporate greenspace provision into the development.

There could also be a significant effect on accessible natural greenspace where there is a cluster of developments in close proximity. The study has been particularly useful in highlighting these areas to us, especially where these cross Local Planning Authority boundaries, for example, south of East Hampshire District and the potential impact of the total development planned in the coastal belt between Worthing and Brighton. We hope that this study will provide a strategic overview to identify pinch points and lead to greater cross-boundary partnership working to deliver green infrastructure, which will increasingly be required to delivery effective solutions.



## RECREATION AND BIODIVERSITY

As custodians of a nationally important landscape, we have to balance our purposes to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage with promoting opportunities for people to understand and enjoy its special qualities. This duty also extends to other relevant authorities that have the potential to influence the National Park landscape through their activities.

Many habitats including chalk grassland and heathland can be affected by recreational visitors. A range of urban edge impacts can also be damaging and include fly-tipping, arson, damage to the site and littering.

Recreation can disturb wildlife, including over-wintering and breeding birds on coasts and in estuaries and wetlands, as well as the ground nesting birds of heathlands. Some recreational activity may also cause conflict with grazing animals, which then affects biodiversity through limiting nature conservation management.

We looked both at sites given the highest level of legal protection, under European law (Natura 2000 sites) as well as identifying additional sites which might be under pressure.

Any development or project that might impact on a Natura 2000 site needs to be assessed. Through examining these assessments, we found that 17 designated sites were considered potentially sensitive to increased recreational activity.

We also consulted our National Park Rangers, along with other nature conservation professionals in partner organisations, so that we could understand the key issues facing sites in their patch and draw together an extended list of other sites which were potentially sensitive.<sup>5</sup>

We identified a total of 57 additional sites through this consultation. Many were protected nature conservation sites with the largest grouping being 27 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, which are of UK importance. Also highlighted were locally important sites; 12 Local Nature Reserves and 3 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance. The conservation professionals also considered an additional 8 Natura 2000 sites not highlighted in the assessments potentially to be sensitive to recreation.

The main habitat types for all the sites were heathland and chalk downland, although other habitats such as rivers and woodlands were also included.

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<sup>5</sup> Area Managers for the SDNPA, National Trust, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Natural England.

### MOST COMMON IMPACTS:

- Disturbance to breeding birds (mainly heathland but some chalk downland sites);
- Limiting conservation grazing, especially due to worrying of livestock by dogs (chalk downland and heathland sites);
- Dog waste (nutrient enrichment and anti-social element);
- Erosion from various sources including high numbers of people and motorised vehicles; and
- Various anti-social behaviours, e.g. fires, vandalism, damage, unauthorised camping.

Several of the highlighted sites form the largest areas of accessible natural greenspace in the study area and are very important areas for recreation.

The study provides a first step in helping us and our partners to take a coordinated approach. Further information is now needed to understand the pressures on each site and how a strategic approach, either in visitor management techniques, promotion or greenspace provision could help to protect them.

The relationship of these sites to sites of accessible natural greenspace is also important because, for example, at particularly sensitive periods there may be the scope to encourage visitors to explore less vulnerable sites thereby protecting wildlife.

## CASE STUDY

The SDNPA led *Take the Lead* campaign aims to promote and increase responsible dog management.

Central to the message is an animated video which aims to raise awareness and recruit ambassadors – 17,000 views so far.

It is based on positive reinforcement of responsible dog ownership building on insight gained from earlier research.<sup>6</sup>

[www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoying/could-you-and-your-dog-be-the-voice-of-responsible-dog-walking-in-the-south-downs](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoying/could-you-and-your-dog-be-the-voice-of-responsible-dog-walking-in-the-south-downs)



6. Understanding the Psychology of Walkers with Dogs: new approaches to better management (2006) by the University of Portsmouth, Hampshire County Council, The Kennel Club and The Countryside Agency.

## THE ACCESS AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT NETWORK

We also investigated how well areas are served by the public rights of way network and by public transport.<sup>7</sup> This helped us to assess the effectiveness of the current network in connecting local communities and visitors to various countryside sites and areas, and to identify gaps and opportunities for future development.

### PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

The South Downs National Park generally has higher levels of provision of both rights of way and cycling networks than the surrounding areas. The density of public rights of way is above 2km per km<sup>2</sup> across large areas. The Chichester, Horsham, Arun, Mid Sussex, Wealden and Eastbourne areas of the National Park have particularly high public rights of way density.

In the National Park there are very few areas that lack both local accessible natural greenspace and public rights of way (see map overleaf). The analysis revealed only a few areas around Chichester, a small area around Petworth, parts of Lewes district and the Whitehill & Bordon area of East Hampshire.

7 This work has drawn upon earlier transport evidence commissioned by SDNPA MTRU, 2013; SDNPA Transport Study. [www.southdowns.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/390809/SDNP-Transport-Study.pdf](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/390809/SDNP-Transport-Study.pdf)

Outside the National Park the situation is different. The coastal towns, in particular, lack access to both local accessible natural greenspace and public rights of way. Away from the coast, the City of Winchester and parts of Horsham town and Haywards Heath are similarly affected. All of these areas are potential locations for a number of planned larger housing developments.

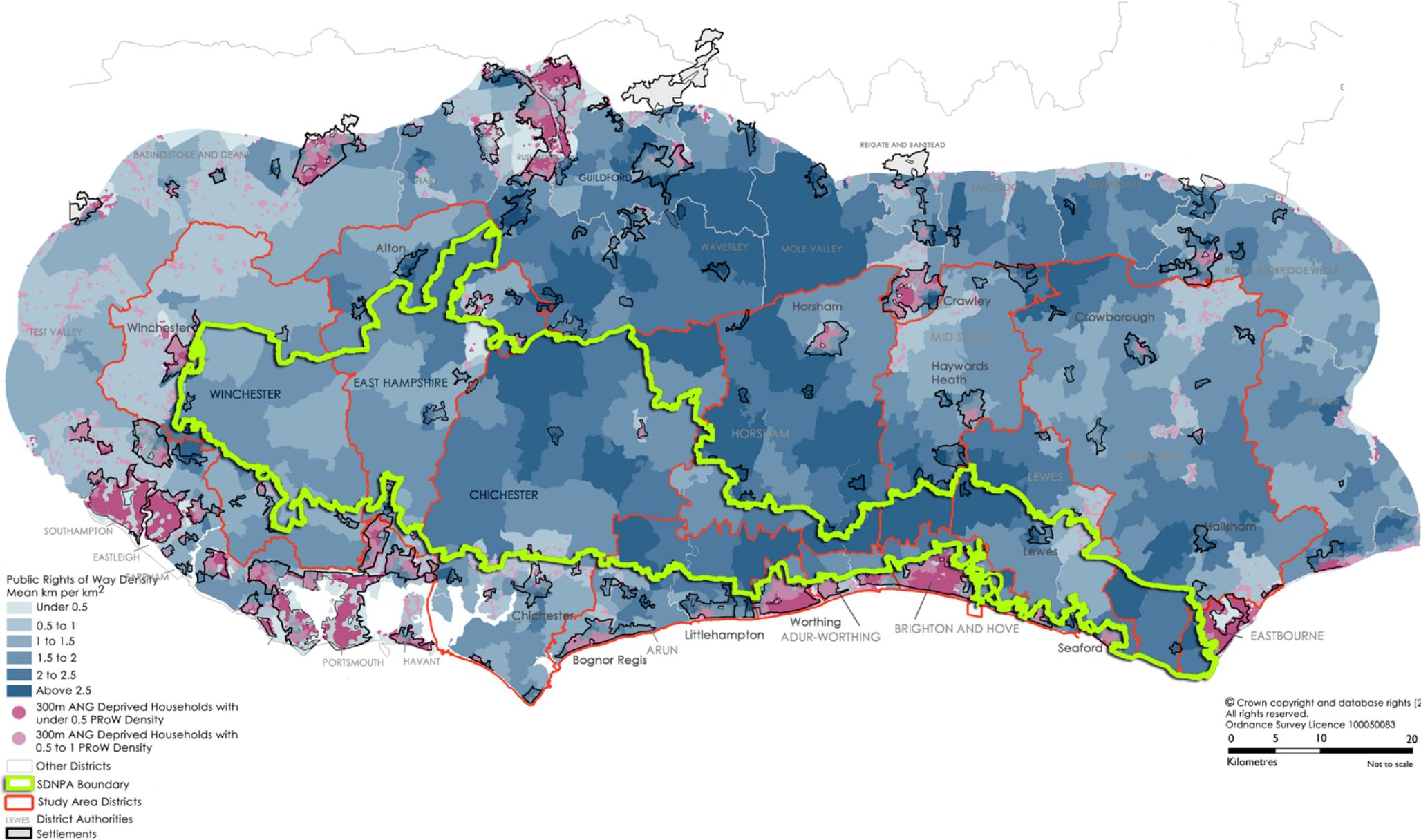
The quality of linear access is not always good and can prove ‘threatening’ in both rural and urban areas e.g. with “Keep Out” signs. Furthermore, rights of way do not always form coherent linked up networks.

### CYCLING

We are fortunate to have a generally well developed cycle network in the National Park relative to the wider study area. Routes which make up the national and regional cycling network and other long-distance cycle routes make a very positive contribution to cycling opportunities. While on-road and off-road facilities are generally good, there are relatively few family leisure routes.

There are also gaps, particularly in local networks, in the links between settlements and to railway stations. Links also sometimes get broken across neighbouring district and county local authority areas. The A27 in particular is a barrier.

# HOUSEHOLDS WITH AND WITHOUT ACCESS TO ACCESSIBLE NATURAL GREENSPACE WITHIN 2KM



Identifying where these gaps exist and matching them with areas of greatest need will help us to address these deficiencies. For example, we are looking strategically at cycle routes which will connect the urban coastal settlements to the National Park.

## BUSES

The eastern coastal towns are relatively well-served by buses, both locally and linking beyond into the National Park and to towns in the north of the study area. Sundays services, where they exist, are less frequent and sometimes seasonal.

Bus services in the west of the study area are better in the northern rural areas and poorer in the coastal towns and services are also less frequent on Sundays, with only two seasonal routes operating in the Hampshire area of the National Park.

Bus services are particularly important for those people wishing to access the National Park who do not have access to a vehicle. Ownership of cars and vans is lower than average in the coastal towns.

## CASE STUDY

A key success story for improvement of access to and through the South Downs National Park has been the opening of the Shipwrights Way.

This 50 mile cycling and walking route connecting Alice Holt Country Park in the north of the SDNP with Portsmouth Dockyard was opened in 2013.



## THE COAST

Beaches and the coastline provide a unique experience, adding to other types of accessible 'green' spaces.

The South Downs National Park includes the nationally important Sussex Heritage Coast. This 12km stretch of undeveloped coastline between Seaford and Eastbourne is a special and protected area and is partly a Site of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserve and voluntary marine nature reserve and Marine Conservation Zone. This stretch of coastline includes the iconic coastline of Beachy Head and the Seven Sisters Country Park, two of the most visited sites in the whole study area.

Our research revealed that all local authorities regard their coastlines as important, with beach and coastline making an important contribution to open space for coastal towns. Many have priorities to achieve high quality standards for their beaches. It is also clear from residents' surveys that access to beaches and the coastline is also important to residents of coastal towns.

The undeveloped coast along the whole length of the study area is also well protected by local authorities who regard them as strategic gaps between settlements and important areas for conservation and recreation.

Our previous analyses had shown that many of the coastal towns lack accessible greenspace. In these towns the coastline is especially important in providing areas for access and recreation.

The existing approach of local authorities in maintaining and improving these spaces so that they are available to a wide range of users will help to increase areas for recreation, as long as this is complementary to inland sites and not at the expense of providing other greenspace sites or in conflict with sensitive biodiversity.

Coast and beaches not only provide access for local residents, they are an important component of the tourism offer of these towns. The scope exists for a more collaborative tourism offer between the National Park and the coastal towns and resorts.

The coast is valued by both visitors and residents. In a survey of Adur and Worthing residents, 92% and 97% of residents respectively believe beaches are an important open space. In Worthing, 45% of respondents visited the beach every week.

## CASE STUDY

Birlinging Gap is a key access point to the coast with over 300,000 visitors each year.

In 2013/14 we undertook a major partnership project, *Interpreting the Coast*, with the National Trust to develop a visitor centre at Birlinging Gap.

The centre has a focus on information on the important coastal area including sections on wildlife, cultural history, coastal processes and recreation.





# THE NEXT STEPS FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

## THE VIEWS OF PARTNERS

This study is just the first stage in the planning and delivery of green infrastructure in the National Park and we intend to progress both over the coming years. Critical to us in taking this forward is working in partnership with all the local authorities, land owners and other interested parties in the National Park, as well as linking into the excellent work that is already being delivered.

It was important that we gained the views of our partners on how we could best develop green infrastructure planning and provision in the future and how to involve partners and stakeholders in this.

To do this, the draft study was circulated for consultation in January 2014. All the district and county local authorities of the study area, South

Downs National Park members and officers, South Downs Local Access Forum, South Downs Partnership, the Wildlife Trusts and Natural England, and the South Downs Land Mangers Group among others, were asked for their views on the study and its findings.

The consultation showed us that there was generally strong support for the study. We have incorporated feedback from this consultation to produce the final versions of the study reports.

We asked for views on whether there should be a sub-regional approach to green infrastructure planning, how such work should be taken forward and to understand our role as a National Park Authority within this.

Over 80 per cent of respondents thought that a National Park-wide green infrastructure approach

was a good way forward. Most local authorities agreed that it was important to develop a sub-regional approach to green infrastructure planning.

Many also stressed that it was important that future sub-regional work also supported what they were trying to achieve at a local level, both in planning for and developing new green infrastructure.

Many respondents, including local authorities and community-based stakeholders, emphasised that any future work should also maximise tangible improvements in green infrastructure 'on the ground'.

## WHAT NEXT?

We intend to build on this first study and respond to the views of stakeholders by exploring what form a National Park-wide green infrastructure strategy might take. Working with partners will be an essential element of this, to integrate with and support the work already taking place. A selection of current initiatives being taken forward is shown below.

An important next step is to convene a workshop with partners in autumn 2014 to discuss option for strategy development.

This workshop will help to strengthen work across local authority boundaries, identify new green infrastructure opportunities and priorities and explore options for collaboration on funding of joint work.

## A SELECTION OF CURRENT INITIATIVES BEING TAKEN FORWARD

- SDNPA is participating in East Hampshire District Council's planning for accessible natural greenspace provision for the Whitehill & Bordon Eco-town;
- The Sussex Community Development Association Health and Well-Being project will provide a delivery model for future health and well-being programmes focussed on the South Downs National Park;
- We are working with Brighton & Hove City Council on a project to revitalise Stanmer Park as a historic designed landscape. Stanmer Park is well-used at present but could deliver many more community benefits including opportunities for physical recreation and other health benefits;
- We are engaged with WSCC, the landowners West Dean Estate and National Trust and West Dean and Singleton parish councils in extending the Centurion Way non-motorised route from Lavant to West Dean. This is part of a wider vision to safeguard existing disused railway lines for use in sustainable transport measures. Strong support was shown for such an option in a recent consultation on Local Plan options.
- Local Sustainable Transport Funding has enabled SDNPA and its partners to deliver improved infrastructure for walking and cycling and other sustainable transport. Going forward, we will continue to promote the uptake of low carbon transport.
- The *Take the Lead* campaign will form part of the community engagement of our Heathlands Reunited Lottery-funded project as sensitive and appropriate recreational use of heathlands is particularly important for biodiversity;
- The *Pathwatch* campaign is an example of a local initiative, developed by Chichester District Council, which is now being adopted throughout the National Park and Sussex. The campaign aims to combat motorised vehicles using public rights of way illegally and irresponsibly by providing a call line and a reporting protocol to notify police of inappropriate use. [www.pathwatch.info/home](http://www.pathwatch.info/home)
- SDNPA is active in The Heritage Coast Partnership, a newly formed group of organisations with an interest in the coastal area who, collectively, aim to add value to existing work by promoting joined-up initiatives. This may range from the provision of information to access initiatives, landscape and biodiversity conservation or sustainable transport and business opportunities.

