

SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK



Updates

March 2026

SDNPA Parish-elected Members



Parkwide – Vanessa Rowlands, Chair and East Sussex Parish Member

- In January we launched our brand new **Partnership Management Plan**.
- The new **Local Plan** was considered by Planning Committee on 12 February and will be reported to NPA on 20 March for final signoff. The next public consultation will take place in May.
- **Trees for the Downs:** The South Downs National Park has smashed its target of planting 100,000 trees by the middle of this decade – and has now set its sights on planting at least one million more.



Parkwide news contd

- **Outdoor Learning Grant** - This year the grant enabled 6,800 pupils from 119 schools to access incredible outdoor learning opportunities. The grant is currently open for applications and more information is available at <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/learning-and-youth-volunteering/schools-groups/grants-for-schools/>
- **Discover the Downs** – our nature connection programme for schools facing economic barriers to participation engaged over 460 young people this year. We are now taking bookings for visits until October 2026. Schools are eligible if 30% or more of pupils are eligible for Pupil Premium funding. Places are limited and are booking up fast! See <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/learning-and-youth-volunteering/schools-groups/discover-the-south-downs/> or email learning@southdowns.gov.uk



Parkwide news contd – Alun Alesbury

West Sussex Parish Member

- **CIL:** At the end of 2025 we announced 31 projects would receive a share of just under £1.9m and 31 parish and town councils across the National Park shared almost £300,000 to spend on grassroots community projects in their own areas.
- **S106 contributions:** 12 affordable homes have been completed in Westbourne thanks to a £98k contribution. The project also provided play park and recreation area.



Park-wide news contd

- **Access in Protected Landscapes funding** supported 16 access improvement projects including new access routes and improvements, gate upgrades and a new changing places toilet.



West Sussex news

- **Pondtail Wood:** New forest school facilities to help children learn about nature and the environment have been approved at a previously contaminated wood. It comes after a stop notice was served by the National Park Authority in 2016 for illegal felling and the dumping of thousands of tonnes of construction waste by a previous site owner.



West Sussex News contd – Andrew Shaxson West Sussex Parish Member

- **Heritage Skills:** Sussex Heritage Trust are leading a 3-year project delivering a pipeline of support for young people aged 16-25 to gain practical skills in heritage construction and crafts. The project was piloted in 2024 and 2025, showing positive outcomes for young people.
- **New affordable homes on brownfield land:** Much-needed affordable housing has been approved for brownfield sites in Petworth. Unused garages across 11 sites will be demolished and replaced with 19 affordable homes with new access, parking spaces and landscaping - creating a new wildlife-friendly orchard, protecting and retaining existing trees, new wildflower areas and planting new trees.



West Sussex News contd

- **Junior Rangers:** programme gives young people aged 13-16 years hands-on experience in land management, wildlife protection, and teamwork—skills that stay with participants for life. Many use the programme to support their Duke of Edinburgh Award, explore future career paths, or simply deepen their love of the outdoors.
- This year's cohort saw 7 Junior Rangers working alongside the Central Area Ranger team to undertake tasks in a variety of locations across the West Sussex part of the SDNP including coppicing at Lodge Copse and tree planting at Singleton. We will be running a new cohort in September 2026 at locations in the east of the SDNP.



Hampshire news – John Hyland, Hampshire

Parish Member

- **Explorers of the South Downs:** The Friends of the South Downs funded project enabling 4 Hampshire Outdoor Learning Providers to deliver educational sessions for 600 pupils from 17 schools. Schools currently being invited to apply to take part. <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/learning-and-youth-volunteering/schools-groups/explorers-of-the-south-downs/>
- **Timescape:** a partnership with Artscape and Butser Ancient Farm supported the health and wellbeing of people experiencing physical and mental health issues, loneliness and isolation. At the end of the project, training was provided to enable participants to continue their engagement through volunteering at Butser Ancient Farm and with Artscape.



Hampshire news contd

- Our Western rangers have been working closely with the **River Meon Conservation Volunteers** who have won a Collective Action for Nature Award. They have already made a significant impact on the Meon Valley's chalk stream ecosystem through dedicated monitoring, habitat restoration, and invasive species removal.
- **Grandfather's Bottom:** The car park refurbishment at Butser Hill is now almost complete. Marked out parking bays which will hopefully improve the way people park. A large part of the car park has been returned back to chalk grassland (instead of concrete).



East Sussex news — Paul Bevan

East Sussex Parish Member

- Our Eastern Ranger Team have been busy this year:
 - working on 75 Chalk grassland (and other priority habitats) sites
 - restored 2 dew ponds and worked on or surveyed 18 more
 - planted 1605 metres of hedge and laid 135 metres of hedge
- **Species Stories:** 8 writers were commissioned to create new audio and written work inspired by key species from the South Downs at Seven Sisters. Used as the basis of a schools creative writing competition and lesson plans to support creative writing for children and young people.



East Sussex news contd

- **Reimagined Paths:** This youth-led project is being delivered as a partnership between the Charleston Trust and SDNPA, inviting young people to explore storytelling, folklore and myths of the Downland to draw inspiration for the production of an Alternative Guide to the South Downs - a physical guide and map, exploring Firle and the wider area.
- **23 new volunteers recruited at Seven Sisters:** to support events, engaging the public, advising on route and activity options, positive visitor behaviour, giving wildlife, landscape and heritage info, keeping the park and facilities well maintained and litter free.
- **New trough and water supply up to Haven Brow** which enables us to graze this area of the park for the first time in years and support chalk grassland restoration.

