



**SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK
LOCAL PLAN**

Health and Wellbeing Topic Paper (Executive Summary Only)

**An appropriate, consistent, and proportionate approach to
health and wellbeing in the new South Downs Local Plan**

March 2026

(Accessible Version May 2026)

Executive Summary

The South Downs Health and Wellbeing Paper consolidates and summarises high-level information and guidance on “planning for health” to inform an appropriate, consistent and proportionate approach to health and wellbeing in the new South Downs Local Plan.

The South Downs National Park is an asset which can help improve national and local health and wellbeing by providing access to high-quality, natural, outdoor, and welcoming green and blue spaces – and opportunities for walking, cycling, horse-riding and other formal and informal outdoor activities for recreation and physical activity - close to where people live and work. However, open access is a challenge, recreation impacts can degrade habitats, and there are challenges in maintaining local facilities and services and meeting the needs of an ageing population.

Health Profile

The South Downs National Park stretches across the four public health authorities of Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC), East Sussex County Council (ESCC), Hampshire County Council (HCC), and West Sussex County Council (WSCC). The South Downs National Park Authority has explored the data, evidence, plans and strategies prepared by the public health authorities – and other publicly available data (i.e., Fingertips, Local Insight, and Nomis) – to produce a high-level health profile of the National Park.

In summary:

- **Life expectancy** is increasing, **healthy life expectancy** is decreasing, and **gaps** between most and least deprived areas is widening, nationally and regionally.
- The National Park is **healthier and less deprived** than England and South East. However, there are issues with connectivity and a lack of access to facilities, services, public transport, and green and blue spaces.
- The National Park has a **higher proportion of residents aged 65 and over** compared with England and South East, and this proportion is projected to increase, accompanied by a corresponding rise in disability, dementia, and mobility support needs.
- The National Park has **lower levels of crime, unemployment, and residents with no qualifications** compared to England and South East
- The National Park has a **higher proportion of people who work mainly from home** compared to England and South East. Of those who commute, most commute by private vehicle. The National Park has a higher proportion of people

who commute longer distances, and a smaller proportion who commute by active travel and public transport, compared to England and South East.

- The National Park has **lower levels of deprivation** compared to England and South East. There are no residents living within the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in England. However, there are **some areas which have higher levels of deprivation** compared to the rest of the National Park. These include some urban areas within Lewes, Liss, Petersfield, and Petworth, and some rural areas within the Arun and Chichester district areas of the National Park. Of these areas, Lewes Castle has an area within the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in England and this area is also the most deprived area in the National Park.
- The **coastal communities** outside, but adjacent or in proximity to, the National Park experience poorer health and wellbeing, and are identified as having higher levels of deprivation compared to non-coastal areas.
- The **“rurality”** of the National Park potentially contributes to hidden poverty in rural areas, and may be connected to challenges around accessing amenities, facilities, services, public transport, and opportunities for physical activity.

The New South Downs Local Plan

The South Downs National Park Authority has a duty to seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities within the National Park, and the planning system can help to shape the built and natural environments to promote, enable, and support individual and community health and wellbeing.

The adopted local plan includes an objective and selected policy criteria which relate to health and wellbeing. The preparation of a new local plan provides an opportunity to better promote health, equity, and sustainability in local planning policies. Evidence – and representations from NHS bodies and public health authorities – highlight the aspects and determinants of the built and natural environments which can promote health and wellbeing. In considering the emerging “East Sussex Planning for Health, Wellbeing and Sustainability Framework”, these have been refined to five aspects, each with two to six underlying determinants – see Section 6.

The new local plan does not include a strategic health and wellbeing policy because the South Downs National Park Authority does not wish to duplicate thematic policy requirements, and believes it would be more beneficial to consider health and wellbeing throughout the new local plan and its preparation.

In response to NHS and public health authority comments:

- The South Downs National Park Authority has consulted NHS bodies (including ICBs) on an update of the **South Downs Infrastructure Business Plan (IBP)**.
- The preparation of the new local plan has been informed and supported by an **Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)**. This includes a sustainability objective related to health and wellbeing which has been used in the appraisal of growth options, spatial strategy options, thematic policies, and site allocation policies. The IIA also incorporates **Health Impact Assessment (HIA)** which has been carried out on thematic and site allocation policies.
- **Policy SDC3** (Regenerative Development and Ecosystem Services) highlights “creating healthy and equitable communities” as a regenerative development principle, and the proposed policy criteria and supporting text refer to the five aspects of the built and natural environments.
- **Policy SDC4** (Major Development) - and **allocation policies** for larger scale or strategic developments - require **Health Impact Assessments (HIA)** to demonstrate how development will result in inclusive, healthy and sustainable places which improve health and wellbeing for everyone.
- **Section 6** shows where the aspects and determinants of the built and natural environments have been considered in the policies of the new local plan.