

# South Downs National Park Authority

## Research Strategy 2015-2019

---

Version I

<b>Review date</b>	January 2019
<b>Responsibility</b>	Performance and Research Lead
<b>Created</b>	February 2015
<b>Approved by</b>	SDNPA



## DOCUMENT AMENDMENT HISTORY

Version No.	Originator of change	Date of change	Change Description
1.0	Tanya Rowan	12/02/15	Research Strategy signed off
0.07	Tanya Rowan	04/02/15	Final draft of Strategy ready for sign off
0.06	Tanya Rowan	12/01/15	Sixth draft of Strategy ready for review
0.05	Tanya Rowan	30/12/14	Fifth draft of Strategy ready for review
0.04	Tanya Rowan	18/12/14	Fourth draft of Strategy ready for review
0.03	Tanya Rowan	07/08/14	Third draft of Strategy ready for review
0.02	Tanya Rowan	24/07/14	Second draft of Strategy ready for review
0.01	Tanya Rowan	14/07/14	First draft of Strategy ready for review



## CONTENTS

	Page
1. Introduction and background	2
2. Our vision for research	3
3. Why do we need a strategy for research?	3
4. Our strategy for research	6
5. Working in partnership	9
6. Our research needs and priorities	11



## I. Introduction and background

- I.1 Since its inception in 2011, the South Downs National Park Authority (hereafter called the SDNPA) has focused on delivering a wide range of projects and on data collection and evidence gathering to support the development of our strategic documents and plans – for example the State of the South Downs National Park Report (SoNPR) and the Local Plan. We have also developed indicators and are establishing baseline data from which to monitor the impact of the Partnership Management Plan (PMP).
- I.2 We now have a useful bank of data and evidence and are collating this to investigate patterns and trends and identifying where we still have gaps in our information / knowledge base. Our focus for the future is to investigate ways we can address these information gaps through targeted research activity.
- I.3 Our Research Strategy is important to help demonstrate how we and our partners are delivering the PMP and how the SDNPA is delivering our purposes and duty which are:

**Purpose 1:** *To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area*

**Purpose 2:** *To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public*

**Duty:** *To seek to foster the social and economic well being of the local communities within the National Park in pursuit of our purposes.*



## 2. Our vision for research

- 2.1 Our vision is to facilitate a park-wide partnership for the production of research for the benefit of the South Downs National Park that is of a nationally recognised standard. We wish to facilitate innovative research to underpin evidence based policy and techniques for the conservation and enhancement of the special qualities of the National Park and beyond.
- 2.2 Our aim is to be proactive in identifying research opportunities through better partnerships, and identify in advance potential opportunities for joint working and better planning of research projects of strategic relevance not only to the SDNPA but to local and national organisations and other National Parks.

## 3. Why do we need a strategy for research?

- 3.2 **We are required to demonstrate the impact of what we do based upon outcomes in the South Downs National Park.** In order to achieve this, we will rely not only on expert judgment (for example using the Delphi Technique<sup>1</sup>), but also the need for various baselines to be established, monitoring programmes to assess the achievement of objectives, and original research to test ideas and provide answers to questions we need to ask.
- 3.3 We believe that the demonstration of impact will be an important instrument in delivering our research priorities. Our focus is moving towards applied research which is more outcome driven. We believe that this focus will appeal to universities who need to demonstrate the impact of their research in the periodic Research Excellence Framework (REF).

---

<sup>1</sup> The **Delphi technique** is a widely used and accepted method for gathering data from respondents within their domain of expertise. The technique is designed as a group communication process which aims to achieve a convergence of opinion on a specific real-world issue.



- 3.4 Research and monitoring is not an end in itself but is paramount to inform management decisions on nationally and internationally important sites, in the built and natural environment. The SDNPA sees research as vital in helping us support our responses to government consultations on new policies and on Political, Economic, Socio-Cultural and Technological (PEST) changes, and how they might impact on the South Downs National Park.
- 3.5 This is the SDNPA's first research strategy. We want to showcase the unique selling points of undertaking research in this beautiful landscape and culturally rich area, and of the expertise of our staff each of whom has a specialism in our core areas of focus relating to our special qualities which are:

- 1) *Diverse, inspirational landscapes and breathtaking views*
- 2) *Tranquil and unspoilt places*
- 3) *A rich variety of wildlife and habitats including rare and internationally important species*
- 4) *An environment shaped by centuries of farming and embracing new enterprise*
- 5) *Great opportunities for recreational activities and learning experiences*
- 6) *Well-conserved historical features and a rich cultural heritage*
- 7) *Distinctive towns and villages, and communities with real pride in their area*

- 3.6 For the SDNPA, the value of research is twofold. There are the benefits research adds to our organisation and our own bank of knowledge which can generate new knowledge or insights. Additionally, research can be relevant to individuals or other organisations that can use it in their own work.
- 3.7 Our longer term ambition is to support, fund and undertake longitudinal research studies. We recognise that in many instances it will take a number of years for the impact of this work to be felt, for example by society ('How has life changed as a result of intervention x?').



- 3.8 It is essential that the SDNPA retains strategic intent and has a clear direction. Our research plan therefore aligns with the following strategic documents:
- Fund Raising Strategy 2015-2020
  - Special Qualities Report
  - State of the South Downs National Park Report 2012 (SoNPR)
  - Partnership Management Plan 2014-19
  - Corporate Plan.
- 3.9 There has been no known attempt to bring the results of research together to consider the whole of the South Downs National Park or to consider the variety of research activity within the National Park. A more strategic approach to research will increase our opportunities for joint working and ensure we are more prepared when opportunities are announced by research councils and other funding bodies.
- 3.10 Research outcomes are vital to contribute to the management process, as is data collection and collation. The scope of National Park management and the number of organisations involved require existing datasets to be compiled, analysed and made available to them. Relevant, data collection and collation, the sharing of research results and emergent findings from data, needs to be co-ordinated and focussed on the Partnership Management Plan (PMP) priorities.
- 3.11 The purpose of this five year research strategy is to set in motion a coordinated approach to:
- Data collection to fill any information and knowledge gaps
  - The collation of existing data, and
  - Longitudinal research projects of strategic relevance to the SDNPA.
- 3.12 The research strategy and accompanying research brochure outline the level of research activity envisaged and the SDNPA's intention to collaborate with a range of sector specialists and academic institutions.





## 4. Our strategy for research

- 4.1 We will identify research priority areas both internally, for the benefit of the SDNPA, and externally, for local organisations and universities. We will ascertain how these can be addressed and whether something is a local, regional or national issue and requires extensive collaboration – for example with other National Parks and/or other protected landscapes (especially around issues such as climate change adaptation).
- 4.2 We will continue to support a range of research approaches, for example research managed directly by the SDNPA, joint research and research as part of national/international initiatives.
- 4.3 Our main priority is to identify what research we want to undertake in the short, medium and longer term, whether it is possible to do it, whether data/research already exists and if not, how we might fund the research or support it in another way, for example through student placements.
- 4.4 Our **short to medium term** ambitions in relation to building our capacity to support research include the following:
  - Setting up an internal research group of staff representatives across the SDNPA to share good practice and ideas and to ensure a consistent approach to undertaking and reporting on research across the organisation
  - Identifying a list of research priorities to focus on each year through consultation with internal staff, our members, partners and key local stakeholders. Work with sector specialists, universities and colleges to start to address them<sup>2</sup>
  - Ascertaining which local universities, organisations and individuals specialise in fields of relevance to the SDNPA's core areas of focus – for example local archeologists
  - Identifying a number of key contacts at each local university and college – for example, heads of research networks, placements coordinators, heads of faculty, business development managers etc. We will engage with these individuals directly to scope potential areas of collaboration

---

<sup>2</sup> For instance a Cultural Heritage Research Strategy will be developed in 2015/16





- Establishing a record of academic dissertation topic deadlines and submitting our research ideas to universities and colleges
- Discussing with academic institutes the potential for setting up research-based student placements with undergraduate, masters and PhD students
- Creating a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** template to be adapted for each student placement; to be signed by the South Downs NPA, the student and the university
- Setting up research partnerships around specific research priorities/themes with local and national organisations, sector specialists and local universities and colleges
- Establishing our student conference as an annual event (to be held in early July every year)
- Evaluating the quality and reach of the data and evidence the organisation currently holds to ascertain where value can be added and ways to address gaps or inconsistencies in the data
- Establishing what research of relevance to the South Downs is being undertaken where and by whom
- Developing the research area on our website where we will advertise upcoming research opportunities, data gaps that need addressing, and potential ways we can collaborate with organisations and individuals around research. We also plan to provide links to existing peer reviewed South Downs-relevant research for all to access
- Networking more effectively with other UK National Parks, including inviting representatives to our student conference
- Monitoring research councils' and other funding bodies' funding deadlines and forthcoming areas of focus. Sharing this information across the organisation and with external partners.



4.5 Our **medium to longer term** ambitions include the following:

- Agreeing a coordinated approach to research with other UK National Parks
- Forming research collaborations with European National Parks and those further afield
- Leading on a UK National Parks-wide collaboration to bid for funding for large scale research projects
- Engaging with organisations and sector specialists outside the National Park boundary who have expertise in our core areas of focus
- Supporting and undertaking large scale research with reach beyond the South Downs National Park
- Deepening our existing partnerships and developing new ones to help us meet our strategic aims
- Creating templates for consistent and robust data collection and monitoring to facilitate and encourage members of the community, school children, members of the University of the Third Age (U3A) and volunteer rangers to participate in citizen science activities for the SDNPA.

4.6 In addition, we will share good practice amongst our partners and other National Parks and engage and involve them in:

- Shaping the SDNPA approach to research
- Supporting the management and coordination of SDNPA research
- Assisting in setting and developing short, medium and longer term research priorities of importance to the South Downs National Park and to other UK, European and International Parks
- Undertaking and supporting highly regarded research that:
  - Is peer reviewed
  - Has relevance to non-academic communities as well as academics
  - Is not only *in response to* government policy but also that which *influences* government policy
  - Helps predict future trends. Over the next five years we will try to identify opportunities and challenges both up to and after 2019.



## 5. Working in partnership

- 5.1 The SDNPA cannot and should not be delivering research on its own. We recognise that it is only through the development of relevant and robust partnerships that many of our objectives can be achieved.
- 5.2 We are keen to collaborate with a wide range of organisations and individual sector specialists, both locally and more widely on specific research themes or priorities. Our aim is to bring together a range of people with relevant knowledge, skills and expertise to support research of relevance to the South Downs National Park.
- 5.3 Collaboration with partners could include any or all of the following:
- Developing collaborative research programmes
  - Sharing existing research findings
  - Providing access to published research reports
  - Data/information gathering for funding bids
  - Partnering on research bids
  - Identifying, developing and monitoring indicators of the state of the natural, built, historic, social and economic environment in the South Downs National Park, and for trends to be published on our website
  - Evaluating where value can be added to existing data and projects
  - Partnering around specific research priorities/thematic areas
  - Setting up foundation/undergraduate/masters and PhD student work placements
  - Jointly devising dissertation research topics
  - Holding events to bring together researchers and the people who are responsible for caring for the South Downs National Park.
- 5.4 Collaborative research would allow the SDNPA to generate material that we can use locally, while our research partners can benefit more broadly. For example, undertaking major surveys across several National Parks or secondary analysis of existing datasets. It offers potential partners the opportunity to contribute directly towards improving the state of the South Downs National Park and demonstrating the impact of our research activities to the public. There are also greater efficiencies and economies to be gained through shared research.



- 5.5 We are keen to move away from pure research to more applied research where we can demonstrate the impact of our work on the South Downs National Park. We are seeking to collaborate with universities, sector specialists, local interest groups and research institutions to achieve this. We are also keen to link into existing teaching programmes and perhaps add value to modules or run sessions on research in the South Downs National Park. We currently do this for a number of institutions and would like to widen our partnership base.
- 5.6 We anticipate that by working more collaboratively and sharing our expertise we can help institutions achieve their own research priorities. We are looking to work in true partnership with local and national research providers and academic institutions. In the longer term this could potentially lead to large collaborations to attract funding for research.
- 5.7 We are keen to develop our relationship with other UK National Parks to share good practice and expertise and link up around our research priorities. In the longer term, one of our ambitions is to form a 'UK National Parks Research Partnership', which would approach funding bodies and research institutions as one entity, looking to undertake research of benefit to all National Parks, as well as locally.
- 5.8 Organisations and individuals we are keen to broker partnership arrangements with include, but are not limited to, the following:
- **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)**
  - **European networks** of technical specialists such as Archaeolandscapes who develop trans-national projects and seek EU funding
  - **Field Studies Council**
  - **Higher education institutions** both within the South Downs National Park boundary and outside it, where relevant
  - **Independent researchers**
  - **Land owners**, managers and farmers
  - **Local authorities** - including county councils and district councils



- **Local, Regional and National organisations** with specialisms focusing on our seven special qualities and whose values and priorities are in line with those of the SDNPA
- **Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)**
- **National Parks outside the UK.** Over time, we plan to link up with non-UK National Parks via organisations such as Europarc, who a number of our colleagues are already working with
- **Neighbourhood Planners**
- **Residents**, community representatives and other key stakeholders
- **Specialists** in their field, for example local historians, archaeologists, ecologists
- **Statutory organisations** such as the Forestry Commission, Natural England and English Heritage
- **Town and parish councils**
- **UK National Parks** to jointly collaborate on research and share knowledge
- Members of the **University of the Third Age (U3A)**.

## 6. Our research needs and priorities

- 6.1 We will work with colleagues and local stakeholders to identify research priorities. These will be advertised in the SDNPA **research brochure** and on our website. Priorities will be identified based on strategic priorities, local need and national initiatives.
- 6.2 Our research needs will be reviewed every May to August to plan for the following year.
- 6.3 In addition, we will develop an annual **action plan** detailing the initiatives and actions that will be undertaken each financial year to achieve the research vision for the SDNPA. This will also be reviewed every August to plan for the following year.
- 6.4 We will review this Research Strategy at least every five years, or at such times as it becomes necessary to update it. The review of our research strategy will also tie in with the review of our Partnership Management Plan.

