

Case Study

South Downs Way Ahead Nature Improvement Area (NIA)

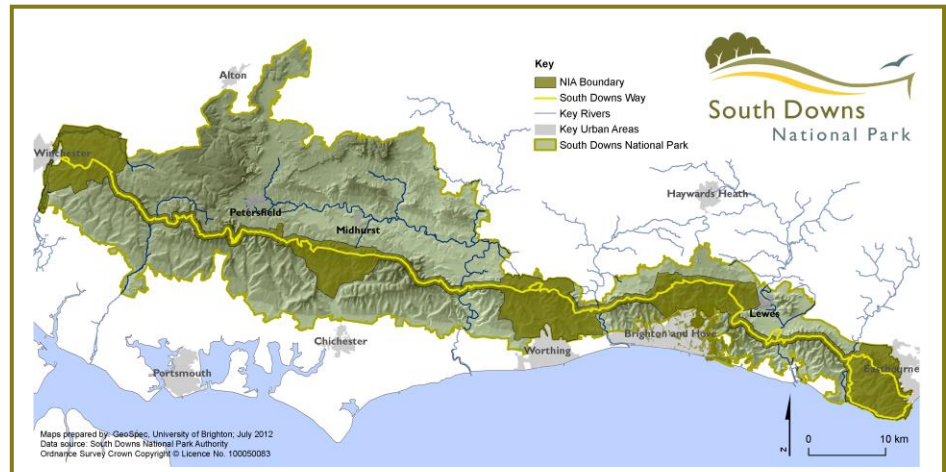
Background

Introduction and background

The NIA project was in response to the Government's review, with the aim of creating bigger, better, more and joined spaces for nature.

The South Downs Way Ahead NIA was one of 12 successful partnerships funded as Defra pilots, with significant matched-funding, to deliver NIA projects, over three financial years, from 2012-15. Its 5 objectives:

- 'Walk the Chalk' to broaden the South Downs Way National Trail as a semi-natural corridor and improve the habitat qualities and experiences of the route;
- 'Linking the Fragments' to achieve real improvements to conservation and management of chalk grassland at the heart of the matrix of downland habitats;
- 'Surface to Groundwater' to demonstrate the viability and benefits of an input-based approach to the improvement of groundwater quality;
- 'Town to Down' to assess and demonstrate the benefits of ecosystem services to urban populations;
- 'Valuing the Chalk' to attribute an environmental, economic and social value to the benefits and services provided by chalk downland.



The project

The NIA partnership comprised 29 Partners. The project received £608,285 grant funding from Defra, partners contributed £1,161,123 in cash match-funding and £1,244,580 of in-kind match funding. The total project budget was £3,013,988. The NIA Partnership achieved its objectives on budget and on time. The project delivered a number of tangible benefits.

'Walk the Chalk' identified 79 sites across five focal areas where chalk grassland would be created or restored. The work was undertaken by SDNPA staff, contractors and the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service. It included grassland restoration and scrub control, development of chalk grassland management plans and installation of fencing and water to facilitate management through grazing.

The SDNPA, in conjunction with Butterfly Conservation, undertook targeted habitat management, successfully increasing the distribution of the nationally endangered Duke of Burgundy butterfly. In the 'Chantry to Chanctonbury' area, annual counts rose by 398%. On the Heyshott escarpment near Midhurst, peak daily counts showing an increase of 235%.

'Surface to Groundwater' led by SDNPA, developed a model to determine the levels of nitrate pollution affecting groundwater across the National Park and identified measures for how to reduce it.

'Town to Down' a suite of projects led by Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) as part of its Biosphere initiative, creating B-banks (butterfly, bee and biodiversity banks) and wildlife corridors in the Brighton and Hove area, underpinning this with the development of a sustainable conservation grazing scheme.

“I am delighted that so much has been achieved in their first year, thanks to the hard work of staff and volunteers. I look forward to seeing the area continue to thrive and evolve further in the years ahead.”

Environment Minister, Richard Benyon, March 2013

The outcome

An evaluation exercise was carried out after the end of the project which concluded that:

- The new NIA partnership collaborated to produce a winning application which attracted match-funding commitments in excess of £3 million, enabling real landscape scale conservation outcomes for the Downs.
- The NIA project introduced and brokered new relationships between organisations and individuals through adopting an inclusive approach.
- As a result of the project SDNPA and partners have a much stronger sense of how one another contributes to the different priorities that affect the National Park.
- The partners felt SDNPA played an enabling role and was a strong leader providing drive, consistency and stability throughout the life of the project.
- There were opportunities for professional and personal development for SDNPA staff, volunteers and partners.
- The wide range of activity meant that significant new knowledge has been generated.
- SDNPA was instrumental in forming a national NIA group comprising all 12 English NIAs. 2 meetings held to date, joint NIA brochure published to celebrate the work of all the NIAs, available on the SDNPA website.



**Restored
chalk
grassland, a
haven for
wildlife.**

The future

Excellent working relationships have been formed with Partners which will be beneficial in developing future projects and working synergies.

The NIA project has finished but the philosophy of landscape scale conservation will be continued through future initiatives including:

Farmer clusters. The Arun to Adur Farmers' Cluster comprising 24 farmers / landowners covering an area of 8,299 hectares has been awarded £110,000 over 5 years under the new Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund scheme;

Brighton Integrated Catchment Management Partnership (CHAMP) to deliver advice and practical land management improvements to the Brighton Chalk block;

£358,500 funding from the Rampion Offshore Wind Farm project to monitor the project and carry out mitigation measures within the NIA Brighton & Hove and Lewes, Worthing and Eastbourne (Heritage Coast) focal areas.

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