

Case Study

Cultural Heritage Audit

Background

The Cultural Heritage of the South Downs National Park is one of the park's special qualities (South Downs State of the National Park report (2012)). The assets cared for by many partner organisations are both rich and diverse.

Cultural Heritage can be found in:

- Built Environment (Buildings, Townscapes, Archaeological remains)
- Natural Environment (Rural landscapes, Coasts and shorelines, Agricultural heritage)
- Artefacts (Books & Documents, Objects, Pictures)

Cultural Heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation; it helps shape how we think about ourselves and how other people see us.

Our heritage is also a major factor in attracting tourists from both home and abroad; a valuable source of income generation for the area.

The Cultural Heritage sector has a long tradition of seeking external funding, however in the current economic climate competition is fierce and financial resources are limited.



The project

The aim of the audit was to identify the cultural heritage projects being planned in the area (from 2014 to 2019) in order to;

- better understand the sector's needs
- identify the potential role of the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA)
- prioritise projects for addition to the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (for consideration for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding) or to other funders, such as Heritage Lottery Fund.

Thereby seeking to ensure that in working with our partners we have best chance of securing additional funds to protect and develop the most important cultural heritage assets in the area for today and years to come.

The project, lead by the SDNPA Cultural Heritage Strategy Lead and supported by East Sussex County Council's Cultural Strategy Manager, adopted a fairly new approach that has not been undertaken on such a large area before. A draft brief was put out to consultancies for market testing of the likely cost, after which an internal funding bid was made and £30,000 secured from SDNPA for this work.

"Business of Culture" was appointed to carry out the audit. The gathering of a consistent set of data for all 149 identified assets was the starting point for analysis and mapping work. From this list all projects that were identified as completing their feasibility stage were assessed against the Partnership Management Plan policies and the criteria of other SDNPA funding streams. There were many projects at the aspiration stage but relatively few that were ready to apply for funding. It was also clear that the amount of cultural provision was in excess of Arts Council guidance – although the provision might not always be where the need is. Therefore new investment could be best spent on improving existing facilities and not to necessarily creating totally new ones.

The outcome

This piece of work has given us the data that we sought and a completed audit record has been produced that provides useful information for the CIL and evidence for the Local Plan. This project was a considerable investment of NPA resources and represents good value for money. The consultants brought specialist skills (Quantity Surveying and project monitoring) which are not available in-house and the considerable time input by the consultants in gathering the data was not viable within existing staff resources.

The consultants worked well with the in-house and GIS team to ensure that the outputs were compatible with the GIS systems and the data sets have been incorporated into the SDNPA's GIS as always intended. Having the GIS data manager in the project team was very helpful.

The survey process raised the profile of the SDNPA with many cultural organisations, who seemed, at first, surprised to be involved, thinking that the NPA would not be interested in their work; perhaps because of a perception of national parks as landscape and biodiversity focused organisations. Some organisations proved difficult to contact and in the end had to be omitted – perhaps because they have a small staff team or run with volunteers only and have many other operational issues to tackle. We had sent out a “warming-up” email in advance, with the text improved after comments by the regional Museum Development Officer. With hindsight, a two tier survey with a short first trawl and follow-up in detail might have been a better way to proceed. The audit was carried out in line with national guidance and a two tier survey was not part of the recommended methodology; this information will be fed back to Arts Council England.

A major and unexpected finding was the lack of available visitor survey information for most of the assets and the poor opportunity this then represented for a consistent survey across the National Park. In addition it also emerged that there is a lack of supported space for younger artists and makers to develop their skills and businesses. This development theme will be taken forward by the Cultural Heritage lead with the NPA Sustainable Economy Officer.

The future

There is a need to keep this data up to date. The Cultural Heritage Strategy Lead will review the information annually, using an online free tool to undertake a short survey. This can be followed up in more detail as needed. The data will continue to be held by SDNPA and is available to partners.

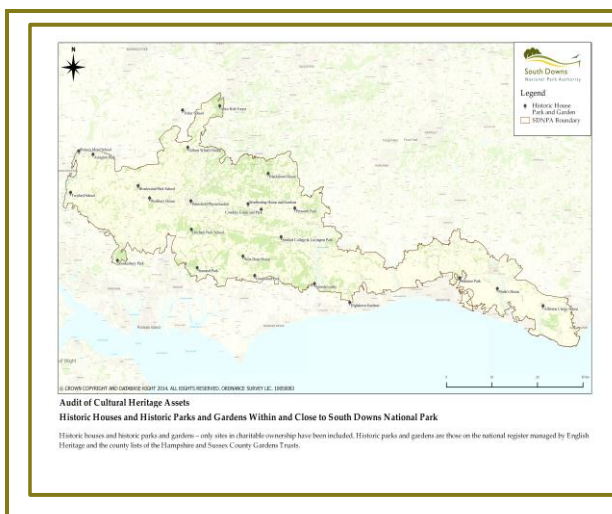
When the Community Infrastructure Levy Fund is collected the amount available for cultural heritage will become known and bids can be made.

The results of this Audit are being used to evidence support for other funding bids made by ourselves and partners to external funders.

The Audit as an innovative piece of work will be shared with other bodies; opportunities for how this can be done without the expense of running a separate event or conference ourselves are currently being explored.

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Map of historic parks and gardens associated with historic houses included in the Audit– from English Heritage and county Garden Trust records.