

## Case Study

# HeartSmart: Walking for Health

### Background

Being active has a whole range of benefits when it comes to physical and mental wellbeing.

In England, half of all adults are not active enough to benefit their health. This means that they are at risk of developing serious illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

Regular activity, just 150 minutes a week, can help to reduce risks to your physical health. Being active can also have beneficial effects on mental health, including improved self-esteem, mood and sleep quality, and a reduction in stress, anxiety and fatigue.

### Walking for Health

Walking for Health, run by the Ramblers and Macmillan Cancer, is England's largest network of health walks with over 400 active schemes. The campaign is dedicated to helping people lead a more active lifestyle by offering short, free health walks in communities across England. It has been running for over 14 years with great success.

All schemes across England are supported by a national team providing free promotion, advice and tools to help raise awareness of Walking for Health amongst policy-makers, funders and partners as well as potential walkers.

To find out about health walks in your area, please visit:

<https://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk>



### The Campaign

The Chichester HeartSmart walks programme, administered by Chichester District Council, offers an incredible range of walks most days of the week all free of charge. The success of the programme is down to the many dedicated volunteer walk leaders, from across the community, who lead the walks on offer. These volunteers include rangers from the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) as many of the walks on offer venture into the National Park.

Although health walks are not guided walks, they do provide a great opportunity for rangers to talk about aspects of the South Downs National Park (SDNP) such as wildlife, farming and archaeology, which walkers may not be aware of and appreciate hearing about.

In addition, the SDNPA have been working in conjunction with existing walk leaders, to combine the HeartSmart walks programme with the successful 'Heathlands Reunited' project - Eleven organisations, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and led by the SDNPA, have joined forces to expand and connect the existing 1% of heathland left in the National Park. It is hoped the walks will raise local awareness about this unique and ecologically important landscape whilst offering all the health benefits that exercise can bring.

To find out more about the HeartSmart walks programme, please visit <http://www.chichester.gov.uk/heartsmart#heartsmart>

To find out more about our local heathlands, please visit <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/heathland/heathlands-reunited/>

“When we retired it would have been so easy for us not to meet new people but as a result of the HeartSmart walks we have made new friendships and love the exercise. It has motivated us to volunteer as walk leaders for HeartSmart. We lead our first walk next week.”

Alison & Peter, Selsey - Walk Participants

### The outcome

The walks have proved popular with high turnouts and repeat attendees. The initiative has given many the self confidence to walk the same routes independently, without the need of a guide. It has also provided the opportunity for participants to meet new people and establish new friendships.

“I am getting out, meeting people and discovering so much more of the countryside close to me all thanks to HeartSmart.”

**Ian, Chichester**

“Improving my fitness, varied scenery and friendship, even if it’s only for the duration of the walk, have been major benefits for me. The SDNPA are enthusiastic about supporting an excellent scheme and, by leading some walks, we can offer support in a very practical way. Having a SDNP ranger leading the walk, can add real value to the experience through sharing knowledge and bringing the outdoors to life.”

**Peter, Chichester**

**The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) 2014–19** sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 11 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality.

**This project successfully achieves the following PMP outcome:**

**Outcome 5:** Outstanding visitor experiences are underpinned by a high quality access and sustainable transport network supporting improved health & well being.

[southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf](http://southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf)

### The future

Chichester District Council have released their programme of HeartSmart walks for 2018, please visit their website for further details:

<http://www.chichester.gov.uk/heartsmart#heartsmart>

or contact:

[health@chichester.gov.uk](mailto:health@chichester.gov.uk)

Additional SDNPA rangers will undertake training to become health walk leaders in order to increase the number of communities being able to access local walks for health.

The mutually supportive relationship the SDNPA have with the HeartSmart team has resulted in HeartSmart leaders guiding health walks on heathland and will continue to do so on behalf of the SDNPA led Heathlands Reunited project.

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