

## THEME 5: RECREATION AND ACCESS

### INTRODUCTION

**2.245** Recreation and access form important components of a multi-functional green infrastructure network and play a key role in society's social, environmental and economic well-being.

**2.246** Recreational open space can take many forms, from formal sports pitches to open areas within a development, linear corridors and country parks, historic parkland, water bodies, urban parks and play areas.

**2.247** Off road access to recreational facilities include public rights of way and other walking, cycling and riding routes, rivers and canals which in themselves form a vital part of the GI network, providing sustainable transport links and often biodiversity corridors as well.

**2.248** In common with other components of green infrastructure, recreational open space and access routes can provide wider multi-functional benefits to society, including health and recreation benefits to people living and working nearby; ecological value; an important part of the landscape and amenity setting of built development; flood storage capacity, a setting for heritage assets and a component of sustainable development<sup>91</sup>

**2.249** In terms of green infrastructure the focus is on providing opportunities for informal recreation in natural or semi-natural environments where recreation can be provided alongside other aspects of green infrastructure including biodiversity, historic environment and landscape. Informal recreation includes walking, cycling, horse riding, boating, children's play and the simple enjoyment of being in a green space or countryside. Other, more formal sports and activities can also be included as part of a recreational network.

**2.250** The use of recreational greenspace and access is dependent on connectivity with – and accessibility of – the users; so it makes sense to consider provision in terms of where people live and where they like to visit.

**2.251** An interconnected network of green spaces and routes can provide a safe and attractive recreation resource that provides links within the urban area, to areas beyond the settlement boundary and into the wider countryside. This network approach lays the foundation for greenspace and access planning; providing a range of green spaces and sustainable access routes across urban areas and

linking to the wider countryside. Nature on the doorstep, is an important concept of urban living and seeks to ensure that experiencing nature is an everyday occurrence rather than something that requires extra time/ effort to enjoy. It reflects the human need for nature – or biophyllia as it is known.

**2.252** A hierarchy of green spaces and access links can provide different levels of provision in terms of size of site, range of facilities and distance away from users, depending on the size and type of community they serve.

**2.253** The concept of a hierarchy of provision is a key element of a number of widely-applied Open Space standards (see data section at end of theme) and green networks are integral to the Green Infrastructure Strategies and plans of a number of local authorities. However, for some areas local priorities, restrictions on available land and lack of funds mean that these concepts remain an aspiration unless alternative and creative methods are used to establish nature networks. Community road verge schemes for wildflowers, garden sharing for growing produce, new commons and off grid communities for examples.

91 National Planning Policy Network paragraphs 6-10



Egrets Way, Ouse Valley © SDNPA/  
AndrewPickettPhoto.com

## OPEN SPACE STANDARDS

**2.254** Standards for open space are a useful tool in assessing current levels and quality of greenspace and planning for better provision and open space standards are often incorporated into local development plans as targets. Standards may be set locally, but are often selected from established standards including those for accessibility and quantity such as ANGSt (Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard), F.I.T. (Fields in Trust standard) or The Woodland Access Standard (see data section at end of theme).

### Open Space Standards

**Accessible Natural Greenspace** was defined by English Nature in the 1990s as areas where a “*feeling of naturalness predominates*” (Natural England (2010), Nature Nearby, Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance\*). The Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) was developed by Natural England (NE) and was based on research into minimum distances people would travel to the natural environment. The standard uses distance thresholds to define the maximum distance that any resident should have to travel from their home to reach accessible natural or semi-natural greenspace which is freely accessible. It is divided into four tiers:

1. Sub-regional provision Sites or habitats over 500ha within 10km;
2. County scale provision Sites or habitats over 100ha within 5 km;
3. District scale provision Sites or habitats over 20ha within 2km;
4. Neighbourhood scale provision Sites or habitats over 2ha within 300m.

In addition the standard also recommends a minimum of one hectare of statutory Local Nature Reserves per thousand population.

\* (based on Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) Model; English Nature (2003) Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards in towns and Cities: A review and Toolkit for Implementation)

**F.I.T.** (Fields in Trust standard) sets out benchmark standards for the provision of outdoor sport and play. Fields in Trust is the operating name of the National Playing Fields Association. Since the 1930s their recommendations for open space standards have been known as ‘The Six Acre Standard’ – this is currently set out in their document ‘Planning and Design for Outdoor Sport and Play’ (2008).

**The Woodland Access Standard** was developed by The Woodland Trust, and aspires that everyone should have access to:

- a wood of at least 2 ha within 500m of their home; and
- a wood of at least 20 ha within 4km of their home

**Other standards** which may be applied to open space include visitor service standards – such as NE’s standards for country parks (Country Parks Accreditation Scheme), standards for NNRs and LNRs (national and local nature reserves) – and quality standards such as Green Flag. [keepbritaintidy.org/GreenFlag/](http://keepbritaintidy.org/GreenFlag/)



Canoeing on the Cuckmere © SDNPA

## OPEN SPACE ASSESSMENTS

**2.255** Since the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012 (updated Feb 2019) local planning authorities are required to base their policies for the provision of accessible open spaces and recreation facilities on up-to-date assessments.<sup>92</sup> In addition the NPPF requires planning authorities to protect and enhance public rights of way and access.<sup>93</sup>

**2.256** It is for local planning authorities to assess the need for open space and opportunities for new

provision in their areas. In carrying out this work, they should have regard to the Duty to Cooperate where open space serves a wider area. The open space assessments are used as evidence by local authorities in setting local standards as best-suited to their local needs. Although the NPPF does not now directly require a PPG17<sup>94</sup> assessment there is still a clear reference made in the new guidance to the principles and ideology established within PPG17 and it is still regarded as best practice by many local authorities.

## PROVISION OF OPEN SPACE

**2.257** Publicly accessible sites are owned and managed by a range of organisations including local authorities, The National Trust and other third sector organisations. Public access is permitted on some privately-owned sites and access is also provided by farmland owners through agri-environment schemes. Access Land dedicated as a result of the CROW Act also provides around 4% of open access areas in the countryside. Public access can also be a welcome benefit to be gained from Heritage Lottery Funding for enhancement programmes at heritage sites.

**2.258** Local authorities consider the protection and provision of open space as part of their

planning role and may develop policies for the development of open spaces or the broader issue of green infrastructure. However, the provision of new open spaces is increasingly becoming reliant on major developments where green space may be provided on-site by developers, or off-site by others as part of an s106 Agreement or CIL payment.

## LINKS TO ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

**2.259** In ecosystem services terms Recreation and Access are classed as Cultural Services; ‘non-material benefits that result from our interaction with the natural environment’<sup>95</sup>. They provide opportunities for physical exercise, enjoyment and spiritual and cognitive development. However, sites will also provide a range of other ecosystem functions, dependent on their size, habitats, location and connections to other areas of green infrastructure importance.

92 NPPF para 96 & 97

93 NPPF para 98

94 Planning Policy Guidance note (PPG) 17: Sport, Open Spaces and Recreation

95 South Downs Local Plan Adopted 2019; Figure 1.3

**TABLE 5: OPEN SPACES STANDARDS OF NETWORK AREA LOCAL AUTHORITIES<sup>96</sup>**

Local Authority	Amenity Greenspace (ha per 1000 population)	Accessibility Distance	Parks and Gardens (ha/1000 population)	Accessibility Distance	Outdoor Sports (ha per 1000 population)	Accessibility Distance	Children/ Teen Play (ha per 1000 population)	Accessibility Distance
<b>Adur</b>	.72	400m	.22	1200m	No standard set	No standard set	.04	1200m
<b>Worthing</b>	.78	400m	.20	1200m	No standard set	No standard set	.05	1200m
<b>Arun</b>	.82	400m	.02	1200m	No standard set	No standard set	.06	1200m
<b>Brighton and Hove</b>	.58	480m	.92	720m	.47	960m	.055	720m
<b>Chichester</b>	.50	480m	1.60	600m	(inc in parks)	No standard set	.15m	480m/ 600m
<b>East Hants</b>	1	700m	1	650m	.5	650m	.25	480m/ 650m
<b>Lewes</b>	No standard set	No standard set	No standard set	No standard set	1.7 (FIT)	No standard set	0.7 (FIT)	No standard set
<b>Horsham</b>	1.7 (multi-functional greenspace)	No standard set	No standard set	No standard set	No standard set	No standard set	0.5	No standard set
<b>Eastbourne</b>	0.6	1200m	.75	1000m	1.5	1200m	0.1	800m
<b>Mid Sussex</b>	See sports		.2	900m	1.28	No standard set	0.1	300m
<b>Wealden</b>	1.0	600m	1.4	600m	No standard set	No standard set	0.03/0.02	480/ 600m
<b>Winchester</b>	1	400m	0.75	650m	0.75	650	0.5	480/ 650m

96 As of the Examination of the South Downs Local Plan (2018).

## DESCRIPTION OF THE NETWORK AREA AND ANALYSIS

### CURRENT POSITION: OPEN SPACE

**2.260** Information collected by local authorities is a very useful starting point in comparing provision across the Network area and developing green infrastructure planning. However, recent studies<sup>97</sup> show that across the National Park and the wider Network area there is no standardised approach to the assessment of open spaces, the typology listings and components of open space information, or the setting of standards of provision. In addition some local authorities have not set standards for areas in their districts that lie within the National Park. As a result it is not possible to make reliable comparisons of open space provision across the Network area using open space assessment data alone.

**2.261** A 2014 study<sup>98</sup> analysed the access components of the green infrastructure network across the Network area and beyond,<sup>99</sup> including Accessible Natural Greenspace (ANG). The

ANG Standard provides a set of benchmarks for ensuring access to places near to where people live. As part of the 2014 study, ANG data was updated to provide an accurate baseline access dataset. In the absence of reliably comparable open space data across the Network area, ANG data is used as a proxy for open space in the development of the Network.

**2.262** The provision of ANG and open space varies across the Network area as can be seen from Plan 31 (access to ANG within 2km). The National Park areas of Winchester and East Hampshire are lacking in access to natural greenspace; and outside the National Park much of the coastal conurbation from Bognor to Brighton is deficient in open space along with parts of the districts of Horsham, Wealden, and Lewes.

### CURRENT POSITION: ACCESS

**2.263** The NPPF<sup>100</sup> places a requirement on planning authorities to protect and improve Public Rights of Way and access.

**2.264** There is an extensive Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network across the Network area and a range of local, circular and long-distance paths

and cycling routes linking towns, attractions, historic sites and other features.

**2.265** In the National Park the access network is the main way that visitors explore the area. In the National Park around 80% of the land area is farmed or managed and access to these areas may be limited to the Public Rights of Way network or permissive routes.

**2.266** The PRoW and promoted routes network varies across the Network area. In terms of PRoW per km<sup>2</sup> (density) it is clear from the Plan 32 that provision is not uniform across the area. The National Park areas within the districts of Chichester, Horsham, Arun, Mid Sussex, Wealden and Eastbourne have particularly good PRoW densities. Outside of the National Park the densities are poorer to the south (i.e. towards the coast) and in areas near to the National Park boundary in Winchester and East Hampshire.

**2.267** Winchester has reduced access to PRoW but the town is not deficient in local ANG as a whole. The problem is that whilst the town has plenty of ANG, it is mainly on the east of the town, which means that the distances people have to travel to get there are longer than

97 SDNP PPG 17/ Open Space Data Assessment report July 2014; and SDNP Open Space, Sports and Recreation – Background Paper 2017.

98 South Downs National Park Authority – Access Network and Accessible Natural Greenspace Study – July 2014

99 The study included all the districts that are included partly or completely within the National Park and added a further buffer area of 10km beyond the district boundaries

100 National Planning Policy Framework; paragraph 98

the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard recommends and the sites are generally sensitive to high levels of recreation. There is evidence<sup>101</sup> that many residents of Winchester drive to

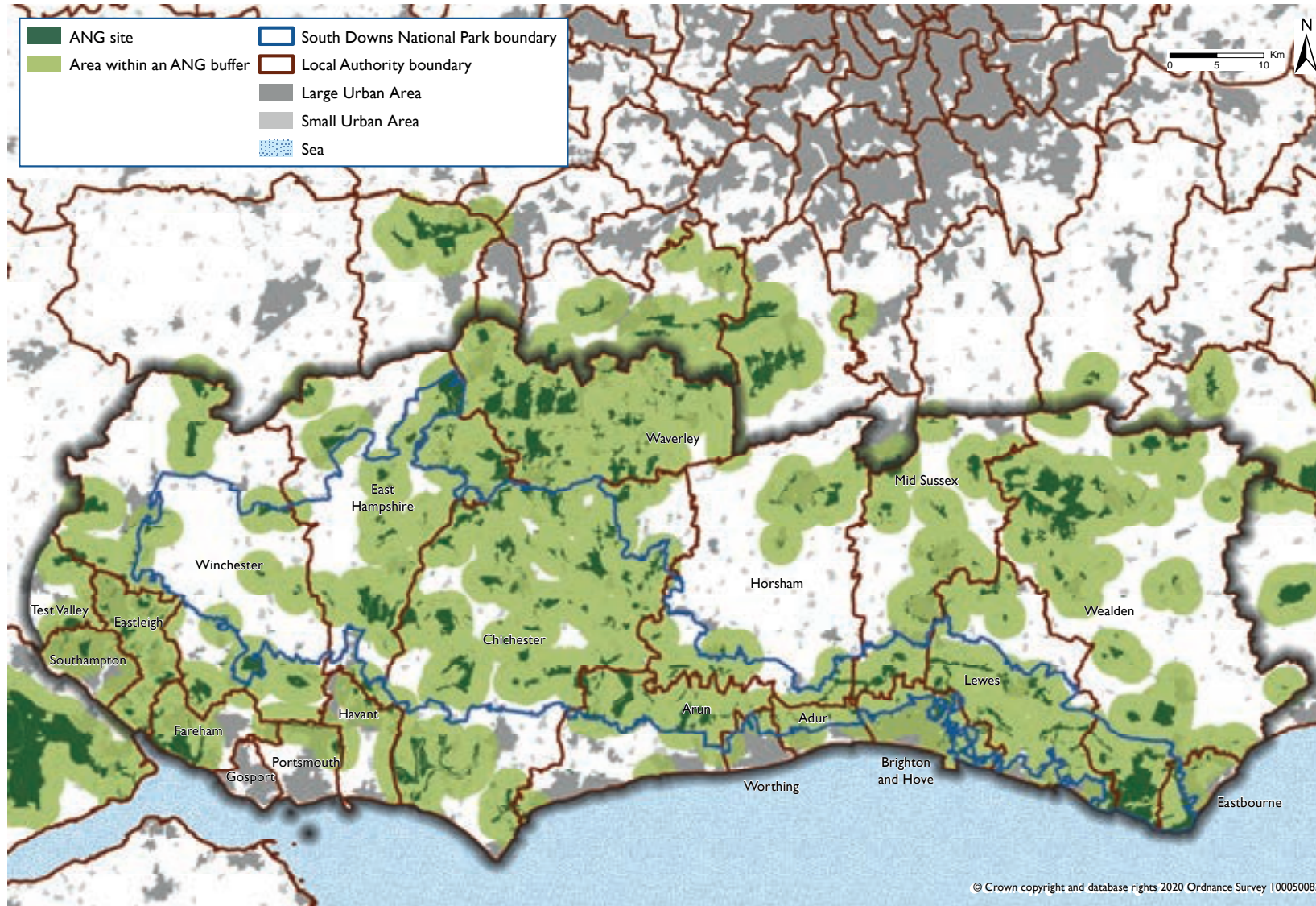
Farley Mount Forestry Commission to the west of Winchester, or the New Forest National Park instead.



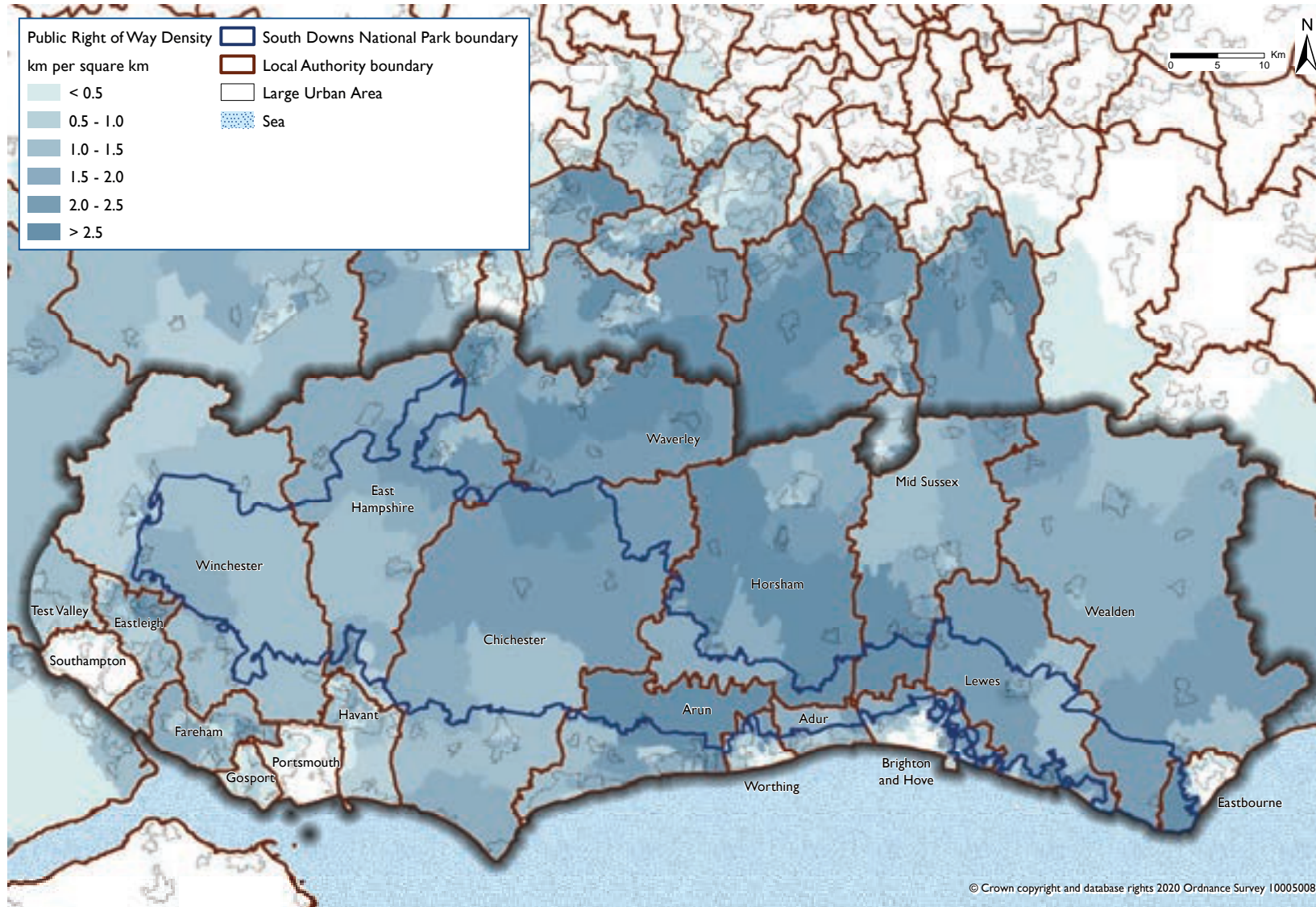
*Walking the South Downs Way National Trail © Mischa Haller*

101 East Winchester Landscape conversation Study Report SDNPA 2020

PLAN 31: ACCESSIBLE NATURAL GREENSPACE



**PLAN 32: PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY DENSITY**





**2.268** Equestrian users are also better served in the National Park than on the coastal plain.

**2.269** Outside the National Park the situation is different. In particular the coastal towns and conurbations lack access to local ANG and PRoW.

**2.270** Parts of Winchester, Horsham and Haywards Heath are deficient in ANG. These three areas are also the locations for a number of planned major housing developments that will result in increased numbers of local people and potentially increased pressure on the countryside access network.

### PROMOTED ROUTES

**2.271** There are promoted walking and cycling routes across the Network area. The National Park, AONBs and local authorities are the main promoters and developers of these routes which explore and in many cases help interpret the rich beauty and heritage of the landscape (Plan 33).

**2.272** The South Downs Way National Trail runs east-west across the length of the National Park and is suitable for walking, cycling and horse-riding.

**2.273** Various north-south routes link with the South Downs Way southwards towards the coast and northwards to main towns. These routes provide the strategic primary network of routes and although some routes are designed primarily for leisure use, they enable link routes

to be developed to towns and villages and public transport to enable local use (Plan 33).

### CYCLING

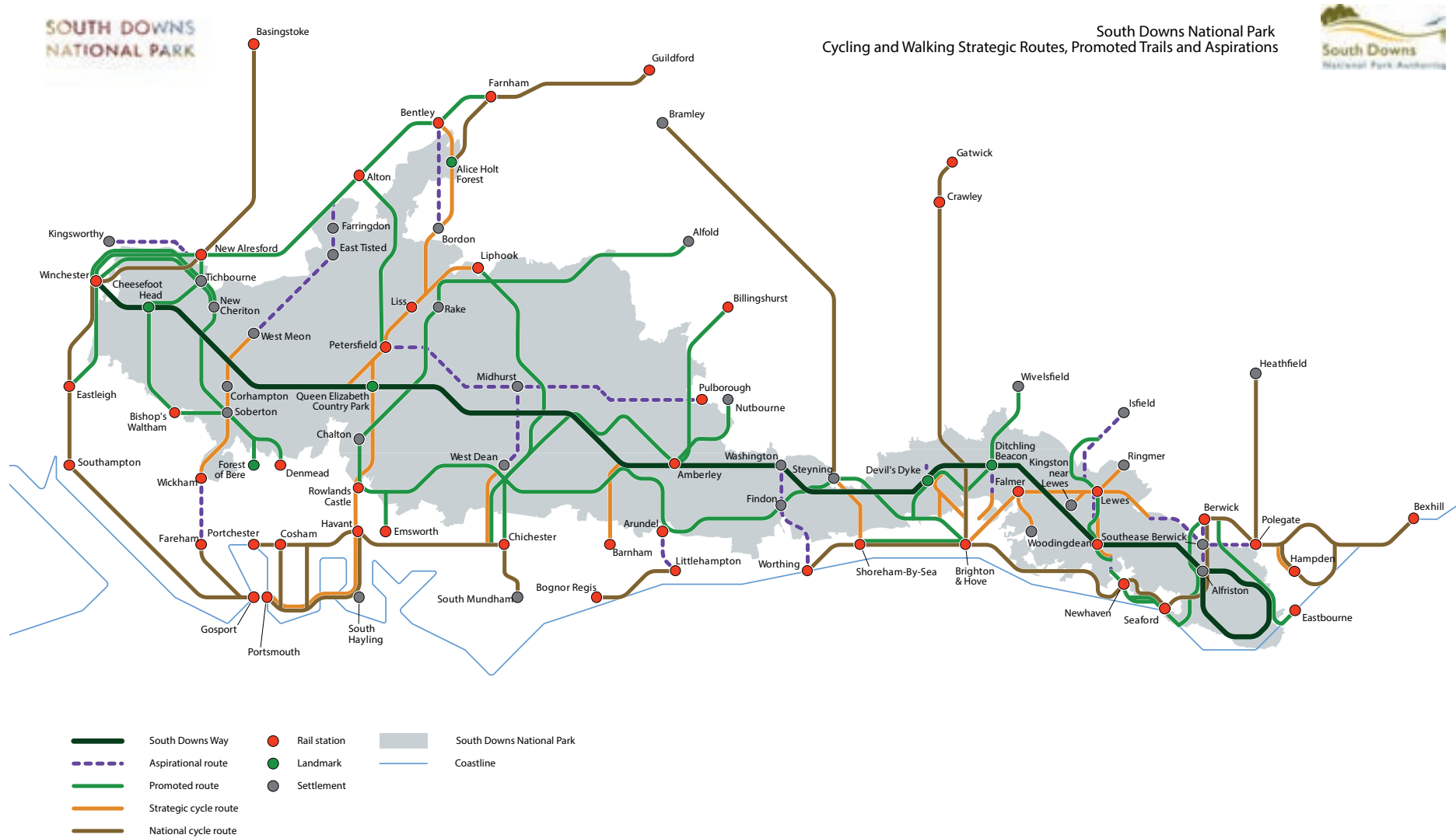
**2.274** A number of long-distance and local promoted routes continue to be developed. The ambition to create a cycling network is being realised and good progress has been made in improving the safety of routes by taking them off-road. However many routes are still running along A roads and cyclists have to negotiate busy traffic junctions. There are areas where cycling could be encouraged – into the National Park for example where sustainable transport could help counter traffic congestion and more link routes to railway stations could encourage commuter and leisure use. In 2017 the Department for Transport (DfT) published its Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS) setting out its ambitions to double cycling levels by 2025 and to significantly increase walking activity. In response many local authorities including the SDNPA, produced new Cycling and Walking strategies. More recently the DfT is now encouraging local authorities to prepare Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) in order to take a more strategic approach to planning walking and cycling networks. A number of these plans are in progress across the Network area. See page 121 for links to the various local authority cycling and walking plans.

**2.275** LCWIPs are the key to securing future funding for walking and cycling infrastructure in towns and have much to contribute in terms of delivery of GI networks. The improvements identified in the emerging plans will not only support local councils' ambitions for increasing levels of active travel through better connectivity for walking and cycling but also contribute to wider GI outcomes including reduced carbon emissions, improved air quality, better access to greenspaces and greater opportunities to improve health and well-being through enabling populations to become more physically active.

### BARRIERS TO ACCESS

**2.276** Across the Network area there are roads, railway lines and rivers which can be barriers to access for walkers, cyclists and equestrians. Along the southern coastal plain the east-west A roads and railway lines hinder access to the National Park and the coast. The A27 is a particular barrier to communities all along the south coast in accessing the National Park, with the A3 and A3(M) barriers to east-west movement. Taking cycling and walking routes away from roads is essential if people – and particularly families – are to be encouraged to cycle or walk to open spaces and countryside.

**PLAN 33: STRATEGIC ACCESS NETWORK**



Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright. © South Downs National Park Authority

## RESPONSIBILITY FOR RIGHTS OF WAY

**2.277** Responsibility for Public Rights of Way (PRoW) within the original study area rests with the four Local Highway Authorities (LHAs).<sup>102</sup> The LHAs each produce plans<sup>103</sup> which provide a network for improvements to the access network in their area. The plans take different approaches, but there are a number of commonalities in their aspirations e.g. encouraging people to walk, cycle and use public transport as a sustainable means of transport and reducing the dependency on cars; improving access for all; improving cycling and PRoW networks and inserting missing links; providing better signage; improving safety and removing barriers to access.

**2.278** In the National Park the SDNPA has a key role in supporting the delivery and promotion of access. Working with the LHAs as part of an Accord,<sup>104</sup> the SDNPA adds value by drawing in funds and delivering access improvements. The SDNPA sources funds from a range of funding providers including the Local Enterprise Partnerships and CIL. In particular, the SDNPA has helped to deliver a number of long-distance routes including the Meon Valley Trail in Hampshire, the

Centurion Way in West Sussex and the Egrets Way in East Sussex. These routes and their promotion celebrate not only the natural beauty of the landscape, but the rich heritage of the landscape and its former uses, helping to bring these routes to life.

Across the green infrastructure Network area the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network is managed by four Local Highway Authorities (LHAs). The National Park has the longest PRoW network of all the National Parks in the UK and includes the South Downs Way National Trail. This is the National Park's most significant recreational resource, and is the primary means by which people access and enjoy the National Park. A Joint Accord between the National Park Authority and the four LHAs provides a co-ordinated approach to management.

**2.279** The SDNPA's recently-completed Cultural Heritage Audit assessed heritage assets in the National Park. Of particular interest, the report highlighted redundant canals, disused railway lines and other routes with heritage value. These heritage assets may have the potential to support the development of further projects to provide access opportunities and other green infrastructure

benefits, some of which are protected against development through policy in the South Downs Local Plan

**2.280** The SDNPA are also helping to improve access by developing multi-user routes. The joint arrangement also helps in tackling more strategic issues such as railway crossings.

**2.281** The SDNPA has legal responsibilities for Access Land<sup>105</sup> and is improving its connectivity by developing links into the wider access network.

**2.282** This is a good example of where joint action with the LHAs enables access enhancements to be addressed across county boundaries. It also illustrates the importance of having plans in place as access enhancements are often opportunistic and respond to the requirements of funding providers and organisational and legal issues.

**2.283** The presence of the SDNPA – and its ability to harness resources – could help prioritise access enhancements into the National Park. The Network offers an opportunity to prioritise where investment takes place and ensures it helps to serve the needs of communities beyond the National Park boundaries.

<sup>102</sup>Hampshire, West Sussex and East Sussex County Councils and Brighton & Hove Unitary Authority

<sup>103</sup>The production of Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs) is a legal requirement of local Highway Authorities under the CROW Act 2000

<sup>104</sup>The RoW and Access Accord signed in 2012 provides the agreement for SDNPA to work in partnership with the LHAs on RoW and Access projects that are over and above the statutory responsibilities of the LHAs to maintain RoW

<sup>105</sup>Access Land as defined in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

## VISITORS

**2.284** Accessible and high quality green spaces are a major part of the tourism offer in the National Park and along the coast and attract visitors from a wide area.

**2.285** The South Coast is a big draw for visitors and Brighton alone is said to attract 4.5 million visits per year to its famous pier.

**2.286** The National Park has a resident population of over 112,000; by far the biggest population of any National Park in England and a further 1.97 million live in the surrounding areas. The park also receives the highest number of visitors of all the National Parks at 20.43 million visitor days per year. As the towns and villages within the National Park and surrounding areas are set to grow, the number of visitors accessing the park will continue to increase. This high level of visitor pressure is already impacting on some of the more popular areas of the National Park and a number of sites are experiencing difficulties in managing the pressure at peak times.

**2.287** Tourism is promoted by a number of organisations in the Network area, including the National Park Authority and the coastal towns.

**2.288** However, the aims of these organisations and their tourism messages are not necessarily consistent across the area. There may be a need for a more joined-up approach to tourism promotion that recognises the sensitivities and limitations of some sites and landscapes.

## HOUSING GROWTH

**2.289** Significant growth is planned for areas of the study area over the next 20 years, see Plan 4 in section 'Why a Sub-Regional Network Approach'.

**2.290** The locations of planned major<sup>106</sup> housing sites were mapped against the existing provision of ANG and against the density of the rights of way network as part of the Access Network and Accessible Natural Greenspace Study.<sup>107</sup> This highlighted the co-incidence of new housing in relation to areas where there are existing gaps in the access network and deficiencies in the provision of ANG,<sup>108</sup> e.g. in Horsham district, Mid Sussex, west and north-west of the National Park around Winchester and East Hampshire and the PfSH districts and coastal towns.

**2.291** To ensure that communities have access to adequate areas of green space for recreation and access in the future, there needs to be an understanding of the potential impact of housing

growth. A coordinated response to planning for green infrastructure will be of value in locations where growth is proposed, particularly where this crosses administrative boundaries, where there is an existing resource, where there are other considerations – such as landscape character or heritage – or where there is potential for creation or expansion.

**2.292** While the specific issues for each area differ, some common themes emerge which have relevance to future green infrastructure projects:

- The differences in provision of greenspace and access across administrative areas and between the National Park and areas outside;
- Lack of comparable information on open space between different authorities;
- Gaps in the network:
  - Deficiency of local or strategic greenspace sites;
  - Lack of connectivity of some parts of the access network which acts as a barrier to access through the landscape;
- How to meet future needs of new populations;
- Barriers to access and how these can be overcome – roads, railway lines and rivers;
- Urban-edge recreation pressures and the impact on local landscape character;

<sup>106</sup> More than 100 dwellings.

<sup>107</sup> South Downs National Park Authority – Access Network and Accessible Natural Greenspace Study – July 2014.

<sup>108</sup> In relation to ANGSt.

- The continuing loss of green gaps and other local open spaces and the impacts; and the potential effects of reliance on adjacent authorities to provide public open space;
- Housing growth and future recreational pressure:
  - Cross-boundary pressures on greenspace and access;
  - Different planning approaches;
- Visitor pressures:
  - On ‘honey-pot’ sites particularly in the National Park, with issues around car parking capacity, local road congestion, impact on the sites and on the visitor experience;
  - On the National Park boundary;
- The need for a strategic, pan-authority approach to the planning of greenspace sites and access;
- The need for strategic and joined up approaches to address specific issues relating to recreation and access across administrative boundaries (e.g. barriers such as highways, river crossings and rail issues; provision of large open space sites; creation of green corridors); the potential role of Local Access Forums in supporting delivery;
- Where local councils are developing Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) ensure that identification of routes linking populations to green spaces is integrated into the process;

- The resourcing – funding and delivery – of access and recreation in a world where it has to compete against many other priorities;
- The difficulties in funding off-site schemes using development funding.

### SOURCES

- Access and Recreation references and further information
- West Sussex County Council
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- Walking and Cycling Strategy 2016-2026 [www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/policies-and-reports/roads-and-travel-policy-and-reports/west-sussex-walking-and-cycling-strategy-2016-2026/](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/policies-and-reports/roads-and-travel-policy-and-reports/west-sussex-walking-and-cycling-strategy-2016-2026/)
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- Hampshire County Council
- Countryside Access Plan 2015-2025 [www.hants.gov.uk/landplanningandenvironment/countryside/accessplan](http://www.hants.gov.uk/landplanningandenvironment/countryside/accessplan)
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- Paths and Greenspaces Access Map <https://bhcc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=43ce3518a50b4c1f88fba062fa38ded1>
- SDNPA
- South Downs Walking and Cycling Strategy; [southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/SDNPA-Cycling-and-Walking-Strategy-2017-2024.pdf](http://southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/SDNPA-Cycling-and-Walking-Strategy-2017-2024.pdf)
- Transport for the South East
- Transport for the South East Draft Transport Strategy 2019 <https://transportforthesoutheast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/TfSE-Draft-Transport-Strategy-v24.0.pdf>