

# ANNUAL REVIEW 2019/20



# A YEAR OF CHANGE IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

**I write this foreword in a very different world from that in which we started the year.**

The global pandemic has meant that we have all had to learn to work and live more flexibly, finding new ways to balance work roles, family life, environmental sustainability and caring responsibilities. As a consequence, health and wellbeing has never been of greater importance and the National Park has never been more necessary as our “natural health service”.

Interest in accessing nature is high and we must not miss the opportunity to show that our National Parks can be at the forefront of national recovery. This Annual Review captures some of our work over the last year to give nature a helping hand – from creating a sand martin nesting site in an old

quarry to restoring large areas of heathland and bringing back elms to the Downs. It also highlights our work to connect people with nature – from the 3,886 children from socially deprived areas who had the chance to learn in the National Park thanks to our schools travel grant, to the “Mend Our Way” campaign which saw key areas of the South Downs Way repaired to welcome the many tens of thousands of walkers, cyclists and horse riders who use it every year.

It has been encouraging to see how the last few months have led many people to discover the National Park for the first time. As we return to some sort of normality, we want to ensure that these relationships with the National Park endure to become the basis of lifelong love, enjoyment and respect.

Recent months have also highlighted more than ever the importance of our farmers, cultural institutions, and local businesses of all kinds that constitute the rural economy. We have been working hard with partners from across the National Park to support rural recovery and growth based on the benefits of National Park designation, whilst supporting our local businesses and communities through these unprecedented times.



At the end of March we launched the new Partnership Management Plan for 2020 to 2025 which provides a roadmap for the Authority and communities and partners across the National Park to support national priorities on climate change and nature recovery. The Partnership Management Plan sets the framework for the Authority's own Corporate Plan, which details exactly how SDNPA will deliver its own commitments.

As we look ahead there will be many challenges, but, as always, we will use the guiding framework of our Partnership Management Plan to focus our work. This Annual Review shows that the National Park, the Authority, our partners and our communities are well placed to meet the future with confidence.



**Trevor Beattie**  
Chief Executive

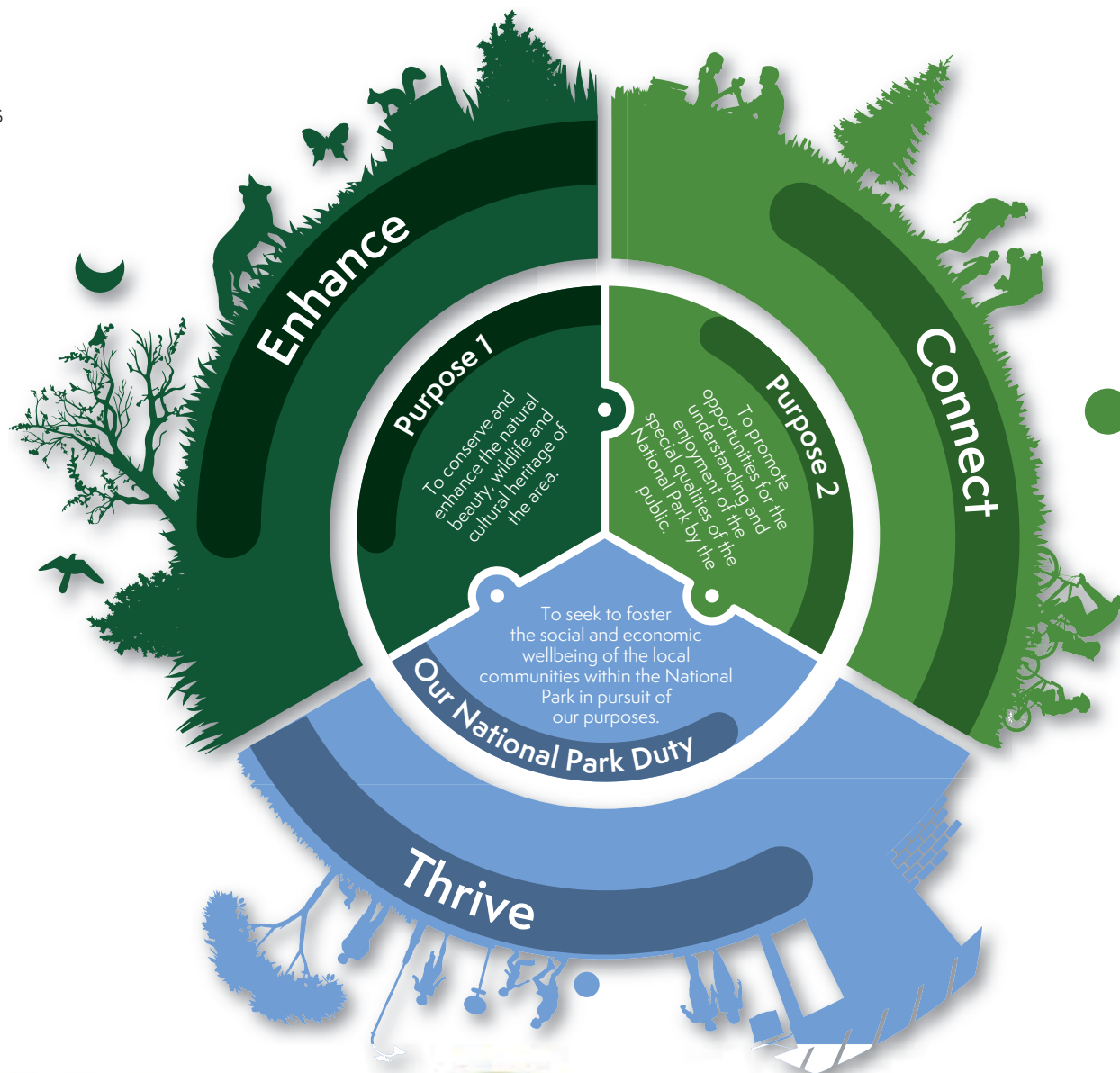
Cover image: © SDNPA – Clayton to Offham Escarpment SSSI

This Annual Review highlights some of our key achievements for 2019/20 which link to the objectives laid out in our Corporate Plan 2019/20 (see [southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/key-documents/](https://southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/key-documents/) and click on **SDNPA Corporate Plan 2019/20**)



# OUR PURPOSES AND DUTY

Our role as the National Park Authority is clearly defined by Parliament in our statutory Purposes and Duty, which are:



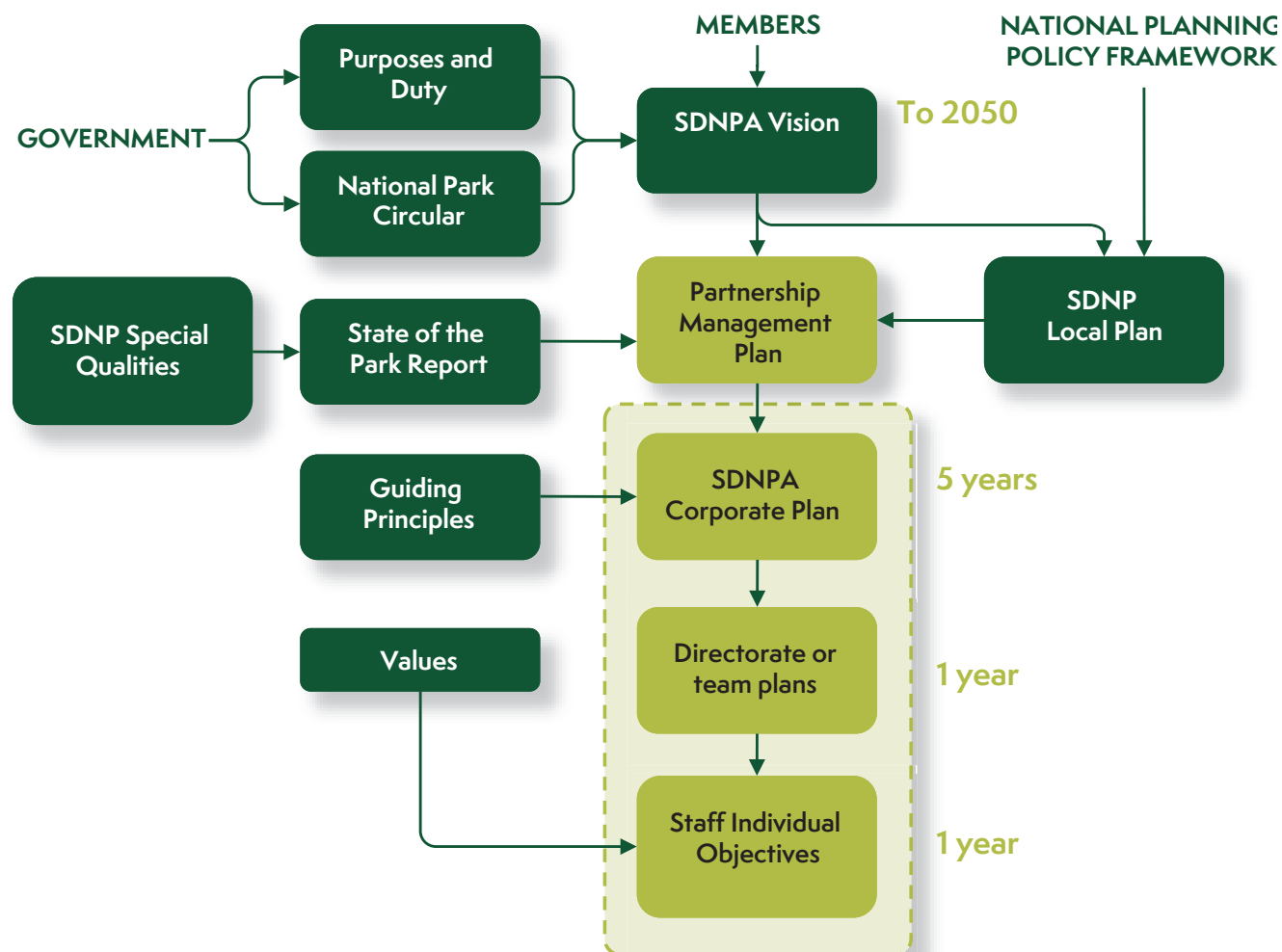


# THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH WE WORK

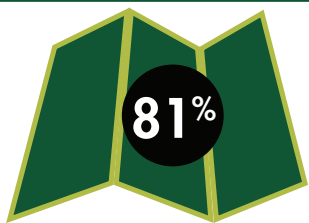
The South Downs National Park Authority's Corporate Plan sets out how we will deliver those elements of the South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) for which we are responsible. All relate back to the 10 outcomes in the PMP.

The Corporate Plan is one of our key management tools to ensure delivery of our Purposes and Duty.

Progress towards demonstrating that we have delivered the success measures will be monitored by the South Downs National Park Authority annually and published in the **Annual Review**.



## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS FROM 2019/20



### PLANNING APPLICATIONS

(major, minor and other) dealt with within agreed timescales



10

ADDITIONAL ENTRY SIGNS installed

### E-NEWSLETTER

SDNP signups to date

6,564



211 FARMERS IN...  
6 FARM CLUSTERS

covering 2/3rds of the National Park



### WEBSITE

UNIQUE VISITS +17%

MORE THAN 500k

PAGE VIEWS +34%

MORE THAN 5.3m



SCHOOL CHILDREN 3,866

from our more deprived communities visited the National Park thanks to the SDNPA Travel Grant

HEATHLANDS REUNITED YEAR 4



471 ha

of heathland restoration work (total to date)

### SOCIAL MEDIA REACH



39,309

TOTAL FOLLOWERS



7.2m

TOTAL REACH



### ALONG THE SOUTH DOWNS WAY



### HEDGEROW



metres laid



OUR 278 SOUTH DOWNS VOLUNTEER RANGERS spent...



DAYS SUPPORTING National Park work



DAYS OF WARDEN SURVEYING on the South Downs Way



### DARK SKIES

During our Dark Skies Festival...



26 PARTNERS

...held over...



30 EVENTS



...involving some

5,000 PEOPLE

# OBJECTIVE 1: SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AS A SPECIAL, THRIVING, LIVING AND WORKING LANDSCAPE

We are continuing to work with a variety of partners to deliver key outcomes which conserve and enhance the landscape, biodiversity and heritage assets in the South Downs National Park. We are also managing the impacts of large-scale and cumulative small-scale developments. Progress against our key objectives as laid out in the Corporate Plan are summarised below:

WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO	WHAT WE HAVE DONE	WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO	WHAT WE HAVE DONE
<b>Work with Defra and farm clusters on tests and trials of the new environmental land management scheme</b>	We held seven Environmental Land Management (ELM) Tests & Trials (T&T) farmer workshops in May and October 2019. These were attended by 125 farmers, land managers and advisors. There were four Key themes across the workshops: for a scheme that is 1) simple, 2) flexible and 3) utilises local advice and knowledge in a 4) collaborative way. A report was compiled and submitted to Defra providing feedback from all seven workshops. Our longer term vision is to have significant involvement with the ELM National Pilot from 2024.	<b>Publish the South Downs Green Infrastructure (GI) Framework and implement a programme of work</b>	The People & Nature Network (PANN) document (Green Infrastructure in the South Downs National Park and Wider South East) is completed and ready for publication and release on the web site. Work on green infrastructure this year has included the East Winchester Study where an Action Plan is complete following extensive stakeholder engagement. The remaining final outputs – technical report, story map and downloadable info page are awaiting completion. We have also held an initial partnership meeting regarding joint working in Natural Capital Investment Area (NCIA) no 2 – East Hants and Heathlands. We will continue to use the PANN evidence base to feed into other initiatives.

WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO	WHAT WE HAVE DONE
<p><b>Support the delivery of the Forestry Champions action plan</b></p>	<p>There are three work streams within the action plan: People, Place and Prosperity. Key achievements are:</p> <p><b>People Work area:</b> Discussions were held with Royal Forestry Society (RFS) to deliver training courses for foresters in the SDNP. These courses are now programmed and being advertised widely.</p> <p><b>Place Work area:</b> New Ash Dieback resilience officers at West Sussex County Council and at Forestry Commission who we will be working with on strategic planning. 'Trees for the Downs' fundraising campaign launched.</p> <p><b>Prosperity work area:</b> South Downs Forestry Champions newsletter produced. Discussions held with an SDNP estate about potential for provision of affordable homes for estate workers.</p>
<p><b>Secure medium-term funding to continue to develop our aspirations around bigger, better, more joined up heathlands</b></p>	<p>Funding for the Heathlands Reunited project was secured in 2016. See page 7 for more details on the project's very successful fourth year.</p>



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# OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

## GOODBYE ChaMP – HELLO TAP!

The four year Chalk Management Partnership (ChaMP) project, a multi-partner collaboration that aimed to protect and improve the quality of groundwater in the Brighton Chalk, formally closed in March 2020. The total project cost was £400,000 secured from a range of partners and grant specific funding. The SDNPA contribution was a £105,000 cash contribution and wider resource support provided to the project team from within the Authority. Key successes of the ChaMP project include the engagement of rural landowners and the development and rollout of land management interventions with a focus on new trials and innovation. These land management interventions have now been adopted as 'business as usual' by Southern Water. In the urban environment, potential sites for rain garden interventions have been identified and taken through feasibility planning. Awareness has been increased with key local authority staff through training sessions and funding for schemes has been brought in from the Highways Agency, section 106 and CIL funds.

The project has been funded for an additional five years. Newly named, The Aquifer Partnership (TAP) launched in 2020 as a partnership between the SDNPA, Brighton and Hove City Council, Southern Water and the Environment Agency, it will continue to build on the success of the ChaMP.

## BRINGING ELMS BACK TO THE DOWNS

The first phase of the project to address the widespread loss of English elm, supplied 1,400 disease resistant elms of 8 different cultivars (plus 200 small leaved lime) to over 70 recipients across the National Park, from Winchester to Eastbourne. Plant protection measures (tree tubes, stakes and cages) were also supplied to ensure successful planting. Demand has been high, and to some degree, the project has also helped to stimulate the supply chain of disease resistant elm. Awareness is growing and even with limited promotion of the project to a selection of key contacts in the National Park, demand has far outstripped supply. Many also expressed an interest in sourcing elms for subsequent planting years, alongside previous recipients expressing an interest in taking on more elms should they become available. Funding is now being sought from the SDNPA to continue this project on for a further two years.



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## HOUGHTON WOODS HIDEOUT

Well-hidden underground in Houghton woods near to Arundel are the remains of a World War II Auxiliary Unit hideout – a base for a secret patrol formed in the early stages of the war to sabotage the German armed forces in the event of them invading Britain. The emergency exit tunnel of this well-preserved hideout can still be seen with 2 bunk beds inside! In summer 2019, Chichester District Archaeological Society (CDAS) were commissioned to survey and undertake a condition assessment, and with landowner permission, has now decided to survey and record all four of the operational bases within their area, all within the South Downs National Park. The information is to be compiled into a published report. The base was initially made known to us by John Penfold, the son of Frank Penfold, who was the commander of the Arundel Patrol. Given the wealth of knowledge and recollections John had about his father Frank and the men who served under him in the Arundel Patrol, that this should be captured with an oral history recording which was undertaken by Arundel museum.

The CDAS survey and report together with the oral history help further our knowledge and appreciation of this perilous period in the country's history, the brave men who served in these patrols and how they used their knowledge of the South Downs landscape to help them in their dangerous task.





# HEATHLANDS REUNITED HERITAGE VOLUNTEERS THE FISH, THE GOATSUCKER AND THE HIGHWAYMAN

**Volunteers who give up their free time to help protect rare heathland habitat, as part of the wider Heathlands Reunited project, have received national recognition in a prestigious award scheme.**

The group of 17 volunteers from the Heathlands Reunited project were highly-commended in the National Parks' UK Volunteer Awards, which recognises outstanding volunteers across the UK's 15 National Parks. The commendation came after the group undertook extensive research into the history of South Downs heathland, culminating in them writing a fun and informative storybook that is now available in libraries and has been circulated to local schools. The 17 heritage volunteers were initially recruited in 2017 to capture the stories of people who have worked and lived on seven of the heathlands within the South Downs National Park. One team of volunteers were keen to conduct interviews with people and launched into a hectic four month period recording 32 interviews, writing summaries and working as a team to gain knowledge of human life on the heathlands. A second team of volunteers were keen to undertake research in various archives. They independently visited libraries, museums, records offices delivering a wealth of information about each heath. The unearthing of these hidden histories inspired the creation of artwork on seven of the heathlands, by artist, Graeme Mitcheson. These stories have since been compiled



into a fun, but educational book entitled "The Fish, the Goatsucker and the Highwayman". The book includes stories relating to 18th century family life on the heath, the tales of highwaymen, the Selborne and Headley riots and World War II. The recordings themselves have been sent to the West Sussex Records Office and are available for public access. The project not only enabled volunteers to learn and apply new skills but also captured fascinating stories for future generations to enjoy that may otherwise have been lost.





# BURY SAND PIT: A NEW HOME FOR THE SAND MARTIN

**Owned by Bury Parish Council, Bury Sand Pit is a disused sand quarry, located at a 40<sup>ha</sup> heathland site near Coates, West Sussex.**

Bramble and ash had come to dominate the old pit on the Open Access site regularly used by the public. Following a site visit in early 2019 the project had two main objectives:

1. To make the site safe for the public by removing the rapidly decaying ash trees.
2. To create sand martin nesting habitat from the currently shaded sand wall, whilst also enhancing the general biodiversity value of the site.

The sand martin, the smallest of Britain's swallow and martin family, is a common summer visitor to the UK. It nests in colonies, digging burrows in steep, sandy cliffs and is commonly found on wetland sites.

To achieve the objectives there were three distinct phases.

1. To fell and remove the decaying ash trees (with the timber sold to offset costs).
2. To scrape the sand wall and drill sand martin nest holes. Plastic pipe was inserted into each of the potential nest chambers and then partially

refilled with sand so that prospecting sand martins could excavate the holes ready to nest.

3. Replant with a mix of native species and install an interpretation panel (made from a felled tree) to explain the project to passers-by. Also create a short video for the public, documenting the work and explaining the biodiversity benefits of the work.

The removal of the diseased ash trees at Bury Sand Pit has made the area much safer for the public. Clearing overhanging vegetation has allowed more sunlight to reach the face of the disused pit, making it more attractive to burrowing invertebrates, a valuable food source for sand martins.

The installation of an interpretation panel, and the video to showcase the project on social media, has helped to effectively communicate the benefits of site management to both the local public and visitors to the National Park.

The main purpose of the project, however, was to create a suitable nesting habitat for sand martins – something which is often in short supply on river banks in South East England. Fingers crossed it won't be long before these beautiful birds move in to their new home!



*"The project has multiple benefits, improving public safety, improving public access, simplifying future maintenance and increasing biodiversity interest — including hopefully attracting a colony of sand martins!"*

**Ed Rowsell,  
Chairman Bury Parish Council**



## OBJECTIVE 2: PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK TO CONNECT TO ITS UNIQUE AND SPECIAL PLACES

We are continuing to promote opportunities for awareness, learning and engagement, seeking to ensure quality access management and accessibility, and supporting the development of sustainable tourism. Progress against our key objectives as laid out in the Corporate Plan are summarised below:

WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO	WHAT WE HAVE DONE
<b>Provide a wider range of opportunities for our South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service (SDVRS)</b>	Between April 2019 and March 2020 South Downs Volunteer Rangers (SDVR) carried out 3,742 volunteer days' worth of work in the National Park. They carried out a range of work, including flint walling, hedge laying, gate and stile repairs, and wildlife surveys. Aside from working with the National Park Authority, SDVRs also work with a wide range of other organisations including the National Trust, Natural England, the Forestry Commission, South-East Water, County and District Councils and local community groups.
<b>Promote the John Muir programme as outreach to families who would otherwise not engage with the National Park</b>	Ten Community organisations have been identified to work with our target families to deliver activities in support of the John Muir Award (JMA). Follow-up visits have been arranged to recruit families. A JMA training session is being planned for staff from these organisations to support them in delivery.



WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO	WHAT WE HAVE DONE
<p><b>Complete improvements to the South Downs Way funded by the 'Mend Our Way' campaign</b></p>	<p>Three 'Mend our Way' funded improvement schemes were identified: Hyden Lane (Hampshire), Pen Hill (West Sussex), and Old Winchester Hill (Hampshire).</p> <p>Improvements have so far included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 950m of byway resurfaced</li> <li>• c.1100m of SDW public bridleway resurfaced and drainage improved.</li> </ul> <p>Further improvement works are planned for 2020/21.</p>

WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO	WHAT WE HAVE DONE
<p><b>Target socially deprived communities to enable schools to access outside learning opportunities via the South Downs Travel Grant</b></p>	<p>The South Downs National Park Travel Grant Scheme targets schools with over 10% of students on Free School Meals in our most deprived urban communities around the National Park and aims to reduce the main barrier to outdoor learning identified by teachers in our schools survey; the cost of transport. The Travel Grant enables these schools to have subsidised coach travel to visit one of over 100 outdoor learning providers on the South Downs National Park Learning Map and supports our network approach to connecting schools and learning providers. For 2019-20 the grant fund was <b>£20,000</b> (10k from SDNPA, 10k from the SDNP Trust). This enabled <b>3,866</b> students from <b>65 schools</b> to benefit from Learning Outside the Classroom in the SDNP.</p>





# OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

## CONTINUATION OF CITIZENS PANEL

In 2017, the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) set up a Citizens Panel for local residents living within or near the South Downs National Park (SDNP). The Panel initially ran as a three year pilot, and due to its success, we now plan to continue with a panel for a further three years. We will continue to survey (on-line only for cost management) the Panel twice a year, in the spring and autumn, as well as sending a bi-annual e-newsletter, in summer and winter. Having our own Citizens Panel enables us to engage with people who have limited knowledge of the SDNP and/or the SDNPA which helps us to evaluate the effectiveness of our work. We have also used the Panel to obtain feedback about the issues important to them (such as climate change) which have since influenced the direction of both SDNPA's and partners' work.

## SOCIAL MEDIA REACH

Between 2019 and 2020 the combined social media reach of South Down National Park grew by 45% with more than 39,000 followers. More than 7 million people saw a SDNPA post across all channels. Instagram had a whopping 107% increase in followers with an average engagement rate of 10.9% (compared to the non-profit average of 2.4%)\*.

Facebook followers grew by 31% and the most popular post was the South Downs 10th Anniversary post on 31 March 2020 reaching more than 56,000 people. Twitter also grew, with a jump in followers of 25% and an average engagement rate of 2.58% compared to the non-profit average of 0.062%.



\* [rivaliq.com/blog/2019-social-media-benchmark-report/#title-nonprofits](https://rivaliq.com/blog/2019-social-media-benchmark-report/#title-nonprofits)

## DARK NIGHT SKIES

The South Downs National Park's Dark Skies Festival was bigger and better than ever this year with an all-weather, action-packed line-up of cosmic fun for all the family. The flagship free event, Stargazing South Downs, was extended to include a new roadshow in Steyning, joining Lewes, Midhurst and Petersfield. Over 5000 people attended over 30 festival events, hosted by SDNPA and partner organisations, across the breadth of the Park.

To promote the Festival, two Instagram influencers – Chloe and Macca (with 30k followers between them) – joined Dark Skies Ranger Dan Oakley for an inspiring evening under the stars at Old Winchester Hill. The content generated will be used by Visit England as part of a media campaign to showcase interesting destinations for tourists.

The SDNPA also launched a Star Party pack online for schools including tips, activities and resources to help encourage school communities to learn about our dark night skies by hosting their very own Star Party.



© SDNPA



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# ARTSCAPE

**In summer 2019 SDNPA partnered with local arts charity, Artscape, to pilot a 3 month programme of activity to connect people, who would not ordinarily access the National Park, to the stunning landscape of Butser Hill in Hampshire.**

In particular, the project aimed to engage participants who were experiencing social isolation through poor health or circumstance. The project used the creation of art pieces to offer participants ownership and recognition of their creativity and in turn re-build lost self-esteem and confidence. SDNPA is keen to explore the efficacy of an art-based approach in improving access to the SDNP for new audiences, as well as the wellbeing benefits to participants.

There were 11 project participants, recruited through existing networks, community groups and libraries as well as social media. They all lived within easy access of Butser Hill and yet very few had visited the site previously.

The group made three visits to the top of Butser Hill, enabling participants to explore the landscape and get inspiration for their artwork. These inspirational visits in all weather, with lots of laughter, were followed by creative conversations and art-focused workshops led by Artscape artist, Mandie Molyneux. The group developed their own creative responses to the landscape using a range of artistic methods including felting, sculpting, painting, photography and collaging. The completed artwork was exhibited at Merchistoun Hall, Horndean and was kindly sponsored by East Hampshire District Council where it was viewed and appreciated by a wide range of local community groups and individuals.

Participants also saw positive benefits to their health and wellbeing and felt more connected to both the National Park and each other as a result of this pilot. In total, the project cost £2,327.59 of which

SDNPA contributed £1,827.59 – a relatively small investment for such a beneficial project. Many of the participants are continuing to engage with the ongoing, regular Artscape art sessions and demonstrating an increased confidence.

Due to the success of the pilot, SDNPA are looking to develop a longer-term project, partnered with Artscape, exploring local heritage sites.

*"It helped me feel very calm especially outdoors and with the amazing views and nature of Butser Hill"*

*"It was so lovely to be with a group of likeminded people enjoying art in a fantastic location"*





# YOUTH AMBASSADORS

**The SDNPA Volunteer Development Strategy (2018) identified a need to diversify volunteering opportunities to ensure a broader cross-section of society can experience the National Park.**

The report discovered that less than 4% of SDNPA volunteers were aged between 16-25, whereas over 70% were aged 55-74. The SDNPA wanted to understand why youth participation was so low in its core volunteering offer and also listen to the views of young people who were not being accounted for within the existing independent volunteer committee.

The Youth Ambassador volunteer role was piloted between October 2018 and December 2019 with the intention being to give young people a clear voice without attempting to control their involvement and fit them into a pre-existing role within the Authority.

Supported by the Volunteer Development Officer, Kirsty Ferris and Cameron Macdonald – two local volunteers aged 16-25 – were given the opportunity to become Youth Ambassadors and make their views heard on how the South Downs could be made more accessible to young people. The progress made by Kirsty and Cameron has led to a distinct change of perspective for SDNPA staff.

Kirsty Ferris spoke at a SDNPA committee meeting in September 2019, leading to calls for a young person to potentially join Members in

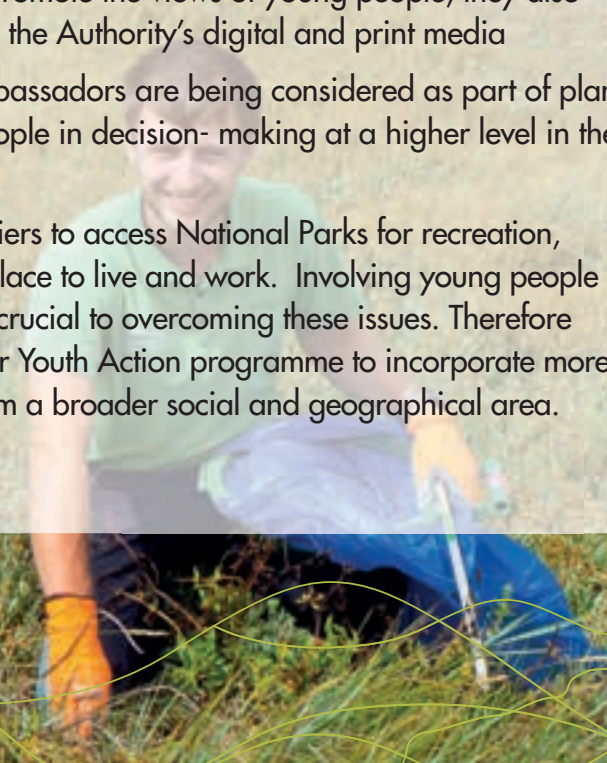
some capacity. This has been championed by Chief Executive Trevor Beattie. The areas most impacted are:

- **Volunteering** – South Downs Youth Action has been created, a new National Park-wide youth project
- **Comms** – both our Youth Ambassadors have been given the chance to ‘take over’ social media channels to promote the views of young people; they also contribute articles in the Authority’s digital and print media
- **Policy** – Youth Ambassadors are being considered as part of plans to involve young people in decision-making at a higher level in the organisation

Young people face barriers to access National Parks for recreation, volunteering and as a place to live and work. Involving young people in a meaningful way is crucial to overcoming these issues. Therefore we intend to expand our Youth Action programme to incorporate more Youth Ambassadors from a broader social and geographical area.



© SDNPA





## OBJECTIVE 3: ENCOURAGE SUSTAINABLE ACTIONS BY BUSINESSES, COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS ACROSS THE NATIONAL PARK, AND MANAGE OUR OWN CORPORATE IMPACT

We are continuing to provide information and support to help communities better understand their environment and the impact of their actions on it, as well as making sure they are engaged in the design and development of their local surroundings. We are supporting the growth of sustainable local businesses. Progress against our key objectives as laid out in the Corporate Plan is summarised below:

WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO	WHAT WE HAVE DONE	WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO	WHAT WE HAVE DONE
<b>Develop a sustainable tourism network for providers within the South Downs National Park</b>	We commissioned a research agency to undertake survey of 409 local businesses in and near the National Park. Of those, 65% are interested in registering as a member of the South Downs National Park business community – a high number of which are sustainable tourism businesses. The next stage is for us to set up the network which will take place early in 2020/21.	<b>Create at least one new hub or gateway to the National Park incorporating the shared identity</b>	One hub/gateway was delivered in Balsdean SSSI, East Sussex, and one is in development at Seven Sisters Country Park. One existing hub/gateway updated at the South Downs Centre in Midhurst.
<b>Operate the Authority's affordable housing grant scheme and continued prioritisation of (free) planning advice for affordable housing schemes</b>	59 affordable dwellings were constructed in the National Park. This is the highest number for some years and represents 19% of all the housing constructed in the National Park in this financial year.	<b>Implement the Infrastructure Business Plan to prioritise allocation of CIL income</b>	The 2019 IBP was approved by Planning Committee in November 2019. This awarded £258,969.60 to West Sussex County Council, £110,986.97 to East Sussex County Council, and £554,965.00 to 20 projects across the National Park. Examples of the projects awarded funding in 2019/20, include £113,000 to Egrets Way Phase 5, £80,000 to Eastbourne Park and £50,000 to Queen Elizabeth Country Park.

# OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

## BLUE BELL COMMUNITY HUB

The Blue Bell Pub in Cocking, West Sussex closed its doors in October 2017. The local community seized the opportunity to rescue the historic, well located building and reinvent the Blue Bell pub into a thriving hub. The group aspired to reunite the community, provide jobs for local people and attract new visitors to the area to boost the local economy.

In May 2019, SDNPA granted £35,000 to help refurbish the building and, in December 2019, the Blue Bell Community Hub re-opened its doors to the public.

The building offers a multitude of uses such as hosting regular community events and training for traditional crafts and skills. The construction of a cycle hub (providing spare parts, mechanics and expertise) is underway. The refurbishment included a new café, restaurant and a small visitor



© The Blue Bell Community Group

centre including visitor experience information and interpretation increasing visitor awareness of the South Downs National Park.

To boost income and secure the future of the hub, the building also offers B&B accommodation and hopes to host a local post office, providing another essential service for the local community.

## BOTANY BAY COMMUNITY INTEREST GROUP

Botany Bay is a small, wooded site near Duncton, bisected by a rare chalk gill stream. The site has been the subject of an ambitious restoration project led by its co-owner, Anne Dennig, since 2014. This followed its conversion to a trout farm in the 70s, when the stream was dammed and several ponds were dug. Botany Bay Community Interest Group (CIG) was founded in 2016 and over the course of the past year SDNPA staff and members of the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service (SDVRS) have



© Anne Dennig



helped with a wide range of practical habitat improvement tasks, including removal of invasive species, coppicing of woodland and improving access to the site. Species surveys have been completed and training of the CIG members on riverfly monitoring, ensuring the water quality of the stream can continue to be checked. SDNPA has also given financial support, funding a new bridge and outdoor classroom. This has helped to open up the site to more visitors and education groups. Cumulatively, the work undertaken has helped Botany Bay become an ecologically healthier and more publicly accessible site – something of which all the staff and volunteers involved can be proud.

## FITTLEWORTH DELIVER OUTSTANDING NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Whilst most Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) require consultancy / expert input when preparing the plan, Fittleworth only contracted support to manage the technical aspects of their evidence base. The entire plan, including policy wording and site selection process, were completed by local volunteers. Preparing the Fittleworth neighbourhood plan was complex due to the sensitive nature of international designations in close proximity to

the parish – the Cocking tunnels and Mens Special Area of Conservation. The NDP group worked tirelessly to engage the wider community and prepare a plan which respected the purposes of the National Park, whilst providing much needed affordable homes in the village. The group chose to allocate land to provide more housing than that set out in the National Park Local Plan. Where, the Local Plan asked Fittleworth NDP to find land to accommodate 6 dwellings, the NDP allocated two housing sites to deliver approx. 18 dwellings. This was in response to community feedback and a housing needs survey which identified a significant local housing need.



# OUR AWARD WINNING SOUTH DOWNS LOCAL PLAN

**In 2019, the South Downs National Park Authority won a prestigious award from the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) for the environmental excellence of its Local Plan.**

It comes after the National Park's first Local Plan was adopted in July and replaced more than 1,000 overlapped policies that were in existence across the area of the National Park with 92 clear policies covering all aspects of planning.

The Plan covers the entire National Park for the next 14 years and rather than being "target driven", the policies in the Plan are based on the nationally-designated landscape. The Plan sets out measures to mitigate climate change including that any major new developments should seek to be carbon neutral, have better drainage schemes to reduce flood risk and limit water consumption for new developments.

The Local Plan also delivers vital "ecosystem services", which are the services provided by the environment, such as clean water and air, dark night skies and tranquillity. It includes over 50 Neighbourhood Plans

developed by South Downs' communities that provide local development management policies and allocate land for development.

The South Downs Local Plan has been informed by a range of factors relating to the special qualities of the National Park, including landscape character, biodiversity and cultural heritage, Neighbourhood Plans, local housing and economic needs and the impact of climate change.

For further details visit: [southdowns.gov.uk/south-downs-local-plan/](https://southdowns.gov.uk/south-downs-local-plan/)





# DROXFORD CHURCH

**St. Mary and All Saints in Droxford, Hampshire is an attractive early Norman, Grade 1 listed Church.**

In 2014 the church was listed by English Heritage on the 'at risk' register. Droxford Heritage working group, formed in 2016, to restore the church and to develop an Interpretation Plan taking into consideration the visitor experience and how the heritage aspects of the building could be communicated to all. The plan envisaged that important heritage features of the church would be exposed and conserved with new displays, information sheets and links to relevant websites to help inform visitors.

The team successfully fundraised £250,000 for the first phase of the project which was to make essential structural repairs to the tower. The group could then focus on building a community annex, needing a further £250,000 to be raised. This was anchored by a grant of £75,000 from the Hampshire County Council Community Business Fund. The completion of this phase would provide the facilities for community events, including concerts, talks, plays, exhibitions, conferences and for the interpretation of the rich heritage of the Church and the Meon Valley. The South Downs National Park's Sustainable Communities Fund (SCF) was pleased to support the project with a £10,000 grant towards the interpretation of the rich cultural heritage of the area, matching equivalent funding from the National Heritage Lottery Fund.

The proposal was well received by the community and the Parochial Church Council, even though it included the removal of a number of pews, and was



finally approved by the Diocese. The interpretation was installed in the church in December 2019. A Community Interest Company was set up to operate 'Wilfrid's Café' which proudly opened on the 6th January. The first four weeks of trading exceeded the business plan's forecasts and expectations and nearly forty volunteers registered to help. As well as offering a welcome service to visitors to the Meon Valley, the café provides an essential social centre for the rural local community. This successful project has not only protected the heritage of the church and offered many social and cultural benefits, it has also resulted in the removal of Droxford Church from the English Heritage 'at risk' register.

# PROJECTS ON THE GROUND

**Relationships are fostered and developed daily between the National Park Authority and the local councils, with Officers attending AGMs, special meetings and workshops with the 176 Town and Parish councils across the National Park. Together numerous projects are initiated every year 'on the ground'.**

Here are just a few highlights from 2019/20:

## A NEW PERMISSIVE PATH FOR RINGMER RESIDENTS



© Ashley Whitlock

For some time, the residents of Ringmer have had to walk along a busy stretch of New Road in order to reach the nearest path onto the nearby Downs. To eliminate this risk and offer easier access to the Downs, the Eastern Area Rangers created a new section of permissive path linking Ringmer and Glyndebourne. Volunteers helped the Rangers to install a new kissing gate and

fingerpost as well as clear an overgrown area to create the new link path. The Rangers worked in partnership with Glyndebourne Estate, Strutt and Parker, local farmer Will Craig and local resident of Ringmer, Ian Loughbrough to create this new section that runs alongside an arable field.

## ENABLE ABILITY



© Weald and Downland Museum

In June 2019, a group of twenty young people and support staff from Portsmouth 'Enable Ability' spent a Sunday morning volunteering on the Centurion Way. They assisted the central team Rangers in keeping the cycle path clear from nettles and bramble and helped to improve areas of grassland by planting out cowslip plug plants.

'Enable Ability' is a service dedicated to supporting people with disabilities and their families. The group meet regularly at the Weald and Downland Museum for various educational activities. The group enjoyed their day so much that the young people who volunteered wrote letters to the Ranger team, sharing what they had learnt about wildlife and how much they had enjoyed helping other people by keeping the paths clear.

## FAMILY RIDE AT WINCHESTER



© Alister Linton-Crook

In June 2019, the SDNPA organised 'Family Ride' took place around the temporarily closed streets of Winchester. There were a whopping and unprecedented total of 439 participants all happily pedalling along, viewing the city sights and 'sharing the space'. After the ride, which is the curtain raiser to the Winchester Criterium and Cycle Fest, Abbey Gardens became a family



friendly area away from the cycle racing. The gardens were filled with many different exhibitors, including the SDNPA exhibition van, and the two brand new i-domes were deployed alongside various child friendly initiatives offering us excellent engagement opportunities. The virtual reality headsets featuring our Dark Night Skies were in constant demand and the giant colouring wall (manned by designers Fancy Features) kept children entertained providing the opportunity to engage with supervising parents and discuss different aspects of the National Park. Engagement was enhanced by over 300 participants returned to the SDNP stand to receive a goody bag supplied by event hosts Winchester City Council, a rewarding 'CLIF' bar to celebrate the partnership with NPUK, plus a SDNP branded item.

## TILMORE BROOK RESTORATION



The Wild Trout Trust and East Hampshire District Council are leading on a project to enhance the Tilmore Brook (a tributary of the River Rother) through some restoration works, with support from the SDNPA. The Western Area Ranger team helped to remove litter and clear nettles, dug out channels and cut back vegetation to allow the flow of water to increase. This will encourage a healthier ecosystem and habitat, especially for the brown trout that like to gather in a deep pool at one end of the stretch. The future aim is to undertake more substantial work, creating more meanders by cutting into

the established bank and also widening the channel. As a result of these recommended works, it is hoped that this section of the Tilmore Brook will continue to be a healthy, riverine ecosystem and an ideal place for trout spotting! This is a perfect way for the National Park to help people learn something about the water flowing under their feet as they head to Waitrose for their groceries.

## WOODLAND MANAGEMENT OF JOINTER COPSE



Jointer Copse, near Ditchling, East Sussex, is a small, ancient semi-natural woodland but has been largely unmanaged for many years. The lack of management has led to the canopy growing too thick, excluding light to the shrub and ground layers. Tree species variety has decreased and bramble has largely taken over. The vision of the Eastern Area Ranger team was to open up the

woods by reintroducing a sensitive, volunteer-led programme of selective hazel coppice restoration and thinning. The cut hazel also provides stakes and binders suitable for hedge laying required in the eastern area. The volunteers have helped maintain access to the site through ride management and cutting back undergrowth. This opportunity has enabled the volunteers to broaden their skills and knowledge of woodland management as most other sites are chalk grassland. Plans are also in place to establish a green wood working area for community and volunteer groups.

## YOUTH ACTION DAY AT AMBERSHAM COMMON



In late 2019 the National Park hosted a Youth Action day for the Change Foundation charity, working with young people from inner city London who may have been involved in gangs and crimes. It delivers placements, mentoring, and sport sessions to help young people into employment or education. Columbia and their PR agency, Brand Nation, teamed up with the charity to produce a multimedia storyline about the day. The day started at Ambersham Common with an introduction to the National Park and the incredible biodiversity of heathlands by Wealden Heath Rangers. Then it was all hands on deck as the participants got stuck into a pine pulling task followed by an afternoon of den building with both teams duly proud of their makeshift creations. Buckets of water were then used to test how weatherproof the dens would be in a deluge, also testing how waterproof the Columbia gear was for the inhabitants. A few drips seeped through on to the quivering testers, but it certainly wasn't a washout! An honourable draw was called.

## LOOKING FORWARD...

### Here are just a few examples of our upcoming work in 2020/21

- Develop nature recovery/nature based solutions as part of the climate change action plan.
- Complete Heathlands Reunited project and secure ongoing commitments to heathland recovery and public engagement.
- Develop the Sustainable Economy and Tourism Engagement Strategic Approach.
- Reduce nitrates into groundwater as part of the TAP project.





# HOW THE AUTHORITY IS FUNDED

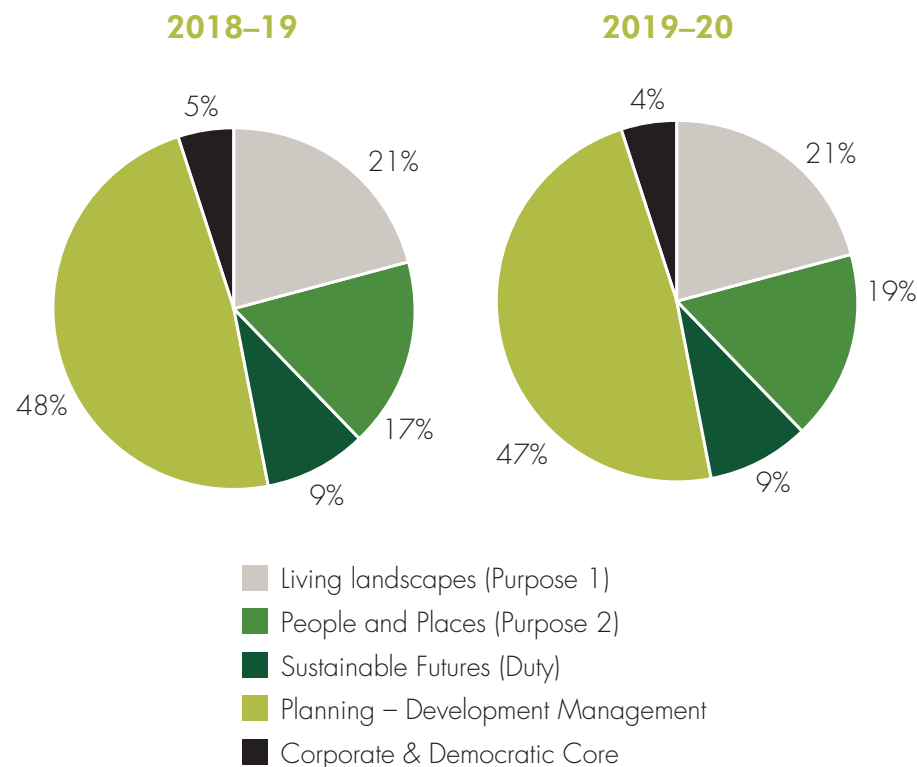
The main source of funding, for all National Park Authorities, is a National Park Grant from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). In 2019/20 the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) received a grant totalling around **£10.486 million**.

As the Planning Authority for the National Park, a significant part of our budget is dedicated to processing and determining planning applications for development. In 2019/20 the SDNPA received income of just over **£1.439 million** through planning activities (including Community Infrastructure Levy).

The SDNPA was also successful in attracting significant funding for projects to deliver the Partnership Management Plan. During 2019/20 the SDNPA received **£1.279 million** of income through specific grants and contributions in addition to funds secured by other partners to deliver work in the National Park.

In total the income received by the SDNPA in 2019/20 was **£13.354 million**.

## SDNPA Expenditure



# HOW THE MONEY IS SPENT

As well as the statutory duty to act as planning authority for the National Park, and the need to provide proper governance by supporting the roles of Members, Audits etc., the SDNPA spends the funds it has available in pursuit of the purposes and duty. The allocation of how those funds are spent is illustrated in the following chart:

# THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK VISION

By 2050 in the South Downs National Park:

- the iconic English lowland landscapes and heritage will have been conserved and greatly enhanced. These inspirational and distinctive places, where people live, work, farm and relax, are adapting well to the impacts of climate change and other pressures; people will understand, value, and look after the vital natural services that the National Park provides. Large areas of high-quality and well-managed habitat will form a network supporting wildlife throughout the landscape;
- opportunities will exist for everyone to discover, enjoy, understand and value the National Park and its special qualities. The relationship between people and landscape will enhance their lives and inspire them to become actively involved in caring for it and using its resources more responsibly;
- its special qualities will underpin the economic and social well-being of the communities in and around it, which will be more self-sustaining and empowered to shape their own future. Its villages and market towns will be thriving centres for residents, visitors and businesses and supporting the wider rural community;
- successful farming, forestry, tourism and other business activities within the National Park will actively contribute to, and derive economic benefit from, its unique identity and special qualities.

For more information on how we and our partners are delivering this vision please have a look at the following documents:

- **Partnership Management Plan 2020–2025**
- **Corporate Plan 2020–2025 (Year 1 Action Plan 2020–21)**





# SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

South Downs Centre  
North Street  
Midhurst  
West Sussex  
GU29 9DH

T: 01730 814810  
W: [southdowns.gov.uk](https://southdowns.gov.uk)

For your guide to everything there is to  
see and do in the National Park visit  
[southdowns.gov.uk/discovery-map](https://southdowns.gov.uk/discovery-map)