

Case Study

Permissive Paths

Background

This project has enabled the continued provision of almost 18km of valuable permissive access routes, both footpaths and bridleways, in the South Downs National Park.

The continuation of these permissive routes has been achieved by maintaining payments to landowners for the provision of permissive paths previously made under current Environmental Stewardship schemes.

The renewal/creation of agreements under current schemes cannot include payments for permissive access and, prior to the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes in 2024, in the absence of this project, there would be a “funding gap” in payments to landowners who provide permissive access routes.

Additionally, the preservation of continuous payments through this project reduces the likelihood of participants opting out of permitting permissive access across their land in the future.

The temporary loss of funding for permissive paths, as Environment Stewardship schemes transition towards ELM, is a national issue. This project addresses the issue only on those permissive paths that have been assessed as the most important for the South Downs National Park.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-land-management-schemes-overview>



Permissive Path in use at Corhampton Lane Farm in the Meon Valley

The project

The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) worked with its partner the South Downs Local Access Forum (SDLAF) on this project. The SDLAF, comprising both access users and landowners, is an independent body that advises on public access issues. The SDLAF shared the SDNPA’s concern that valuable permissive access might be lost as funding for its provision under current Environmental Stewardship schemes was no longer available within new or renewed agreements. It was agreed that the SDLAF would assess all permissive paths within Environmental Stewardship schemes across the South Downs National Park and identify those considered most valuable for the public - for example, because of the experience offered by the path itself, or for the extra connectivity given to the rights of way network. The selection of paths eligible for funding through this project followed a transparent and fair process.

Once the highest priority paths had been identified by the SDLAF, the SDNPA was able to invite the relevant landowners to enter into permissive path agreements. The grant funding offered to landowners was the same “per kilometre” rate as that previously offered through Environmental Stewardship schemes. The funding rate therefore offered good value to the SDNPA as the funding organisation, as it remained at the historic level. The landowners are all hoping that the new ELM schemes will include funding for the provision of permissive access, and the SDNPA funding has enabled them to keep the paths open until such time when the anticipated ELM funding kicks in.

New signage has been put up on all the permissive paths funded by this project. This helps to raise awareness of the availability of the paths to walkers, cyclists and horse riders using the connecting network of public rights of way and roads.

I am delighted that the South Downs National Park Authority's Permissive Paths Project has stepped in to support the continued provision of this valuable network of permissive routes. I very much hope that the SDNPA's Project will continue to "fill the gap" between the end of Natural England's HLS funding and the start of the replacement funding from the Government's new Environmental Land Management schemes."

Robert Raimes, Grange Farm Partnership, Grange Farm, Tichborne

The outcome

The primary objective of the project was to keep key permissive paths open and available for public use. This was achieved and the project has kept over 4km of permissive footpaths and almost 14km of permissive bridleways open. In addition, bespoke on-site signage has been produced and installed for all the paths supported by the project.

Robert Raimes of Grange Farm, Tichborne, explains how SDNPA funding enabled him to offer public access to his land during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The importance of visiting the countryside and the huge enjoyment that people get from connecting with nature have become particularly clear over the last, difficult, year during this coronavirus pandemic. Although several public rights of way cross Grange Farm, these footpaths and bridleways don't always offer the connections that walkers, cyclists and riders want.

For several years now, Natural England had been providing funding that enabled me to open a network of permissive footpaths and bridleways for use by the public. These permissive paths, together with the existing public rights of way, have enabled people to choose different routes and undertake a variety of circular walks and rides that wouldn't otherwise be possible. Unfortunately, the ending of my Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement with Natural England meant that my permissive paths would no longer be funded. Without this SDNPA funding, the provision of additional access for walkers, cyclists and horse riders simply isn't viable."

The future

The expectation is that continued annual grant funding from the SDNPA, for a further three years, will enable these well-used paths to be kept open for public use until the start of the replacement ELM schemes in 2024.

This means that approximately 18km of the most valuable permissive footpaths and bridleways in the South Downs National Park will have been retained for use by the public now and into the future.

For more information on permissive paths or the new ELM scheme, please contact:

info@southdowns.gov.uk



The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP)

2020–25 The Partnership Management Plan 2020-2025 brings together and coordinates the aspirations of many different partners who help contribute towards the purposes for which it was designated.

This project successfully achieved the following PMP outcomes:

Outcome 5: Outstanding visitor experiences for communities and visitors are supported by high-quality access and sustainable transport networks.

Priority Programme 5.2: To improve accessibility through a network of high quality routes connecting communities with the landscape, heritage, attractions and transport hubs and gateways.

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/partnership-management-plan/>

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