

# **South Downs National Park Authority**

## **Survey of volunteering activity in the South Downs National Park April 2015-March 2016**

### **Final Report**

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#### **Author**

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## 1. Background and introduction

In April 2016, an online survey link was emailed to staff at 113 organisations that the SDNPA was aware of and that work with volunteers. This list of organisations included organisations that SDNPA were currently working with, those that had signed up to the volunteering map, and conservation groups<sup>1</sup>.

The purpose of the research was to gain a picture of the variety of activities available to volunteers and the number and demographic profile of volunteers working with the organisations in our sample. Respondents were asked to provide retrospective information for the financial year 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016. By the survey deadline of **6<sup>th</sup> May 2016**, responses had been received from 43 organisations; an impressive response rate of 38%.

## 2. Key findings and recommendations

- Whilst volunteer numbers are on the increase, few organisations utilise the South Downs Volunteer Rangers Service (SDVRS)
- Few, if any, volunteers are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities
- Organisations are interested in receiving financial support and/or training from the SDNPA.

### Key recommendations:

- Undertake a survey of SDVRS to ascertain whether there is capacity for them to take on extra work with partner organisations
- Contact organisations to establish the level of interest in working more widely with the SDVRS – it is noted that staff resource may be needed to manage the extra take up of SDVRS time
- In the 2017 survey, add in a question to probe possible reasons for the increase in volunteer numbers over the last 5 years.

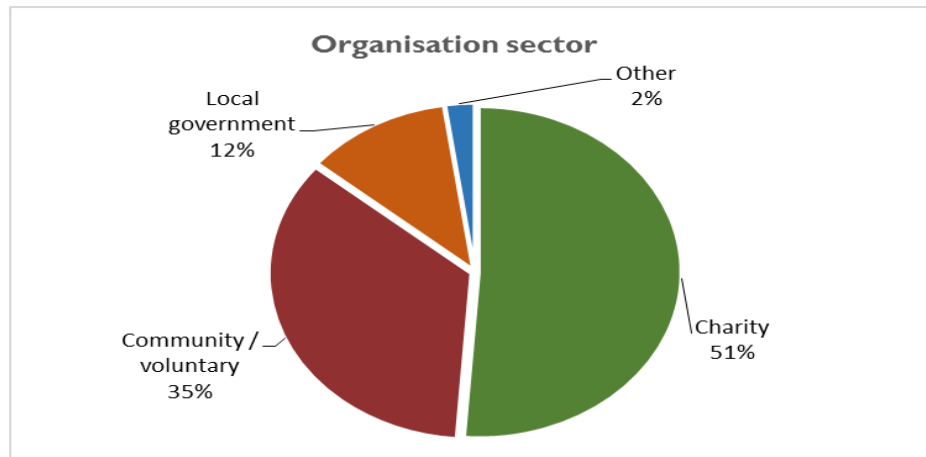
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<sup>1</sup> This list is somewhat out of date and incomplete. It has been agreed that resource will be put into creating a definitive list of organisations in the SDNP that work with volunteers to then form the sample for the April 2017 survey.



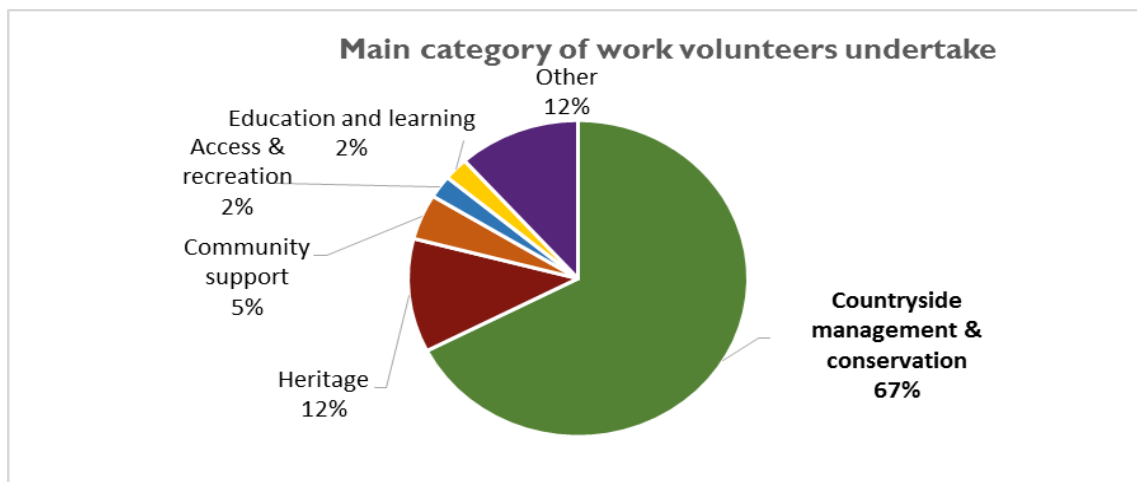
### 3. Organisation profile

Interestingly, half of all responding organisations were from the **charity** sector (51%). A more complete sample database in 2017 will help inform whether this figure is representative of the type of organisations working with volunteers.



Base: all who provided a response (43)

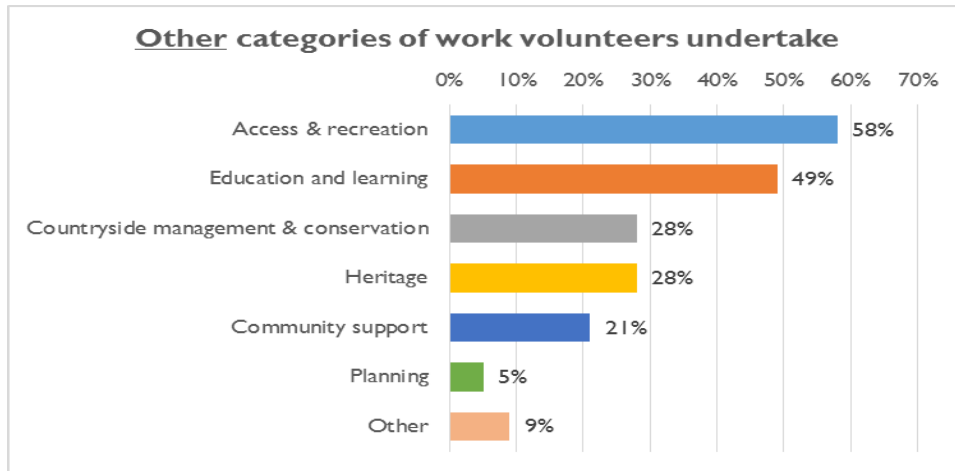
For two thirds of respondents (67%), the **main** category of work undertaken by volunteers was **countryside management & conservation**. This finding is unsurprising given the nature of the SDNPA's work and the organisations we are likely to be working with.



Base: all who provided a response (43)

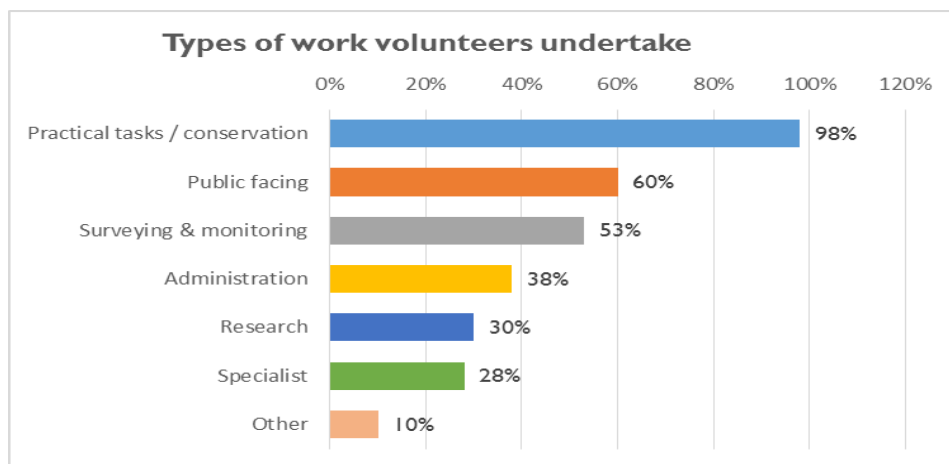


Respondents were also asked what other category/ies of work volunteers were engaged in, the most commonly mentioned of which was **access and recreation** (58%).



Base: all who provided a response (43)

The most commonly mentioned **type of work** that volunteers undertook was **practical tasks / conservation** (98%).



Base: all who provided a response (40)

**Recommendation:**

Add an open ended question into the 2017 survey probing on what the 'type' of activity actually involves as broad categories tell us very little.



#### 4. Number of volunteers work with and volunteer days worked

In the main, responding organisations tended to work with their **own volunteers** rather than the SDVRS – see table below which shows with 29 respondents (71%) did not use the SDVRS. Where organisations used their own volunteers, 51% (21 respondents) worked with **50 or less volunteers**.

Use SDVRS	Use own volunteers							Base (No. + prop. %)
		None %	50 or less %	51-100 %	101- 150 %	151 or more %	TOTAL %	
	None	0	59	10	3	28	100	
	50 or less	20	40	10	0	30	100	
	51-100	0	0	0	0	100	100	
	101-150	0	0	0	0	0	100	
	151 or more	100	0	0	0	0	100	
	Base	3	21	4	1	12		

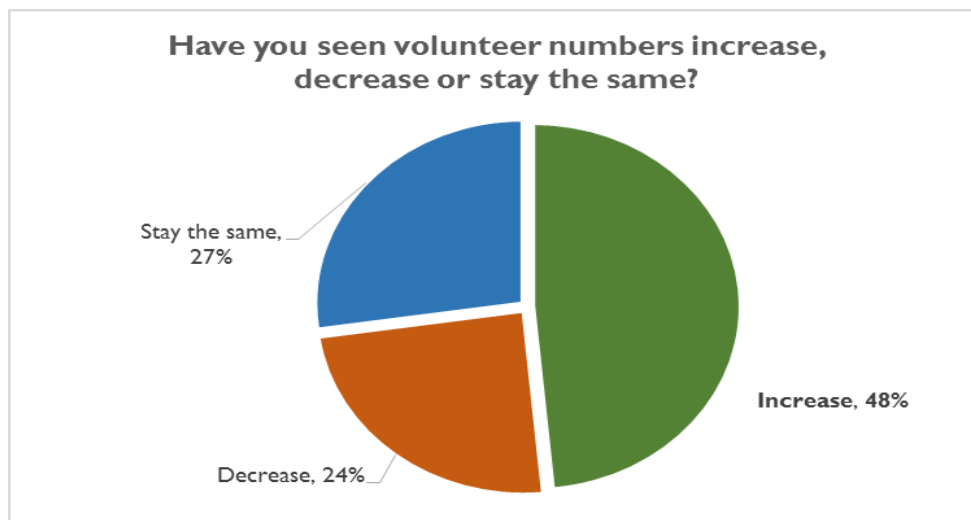
It is unknown whether the 71% of responding organisations who *do not* use SDVRS is an expected response or even whether there is capacity for SDVRS to take on additional work with partner organisations. If there is capacity then **it is recommended** that we include an additional follow up question in the 2017 survey asking whether organisations would like to work more with the SDVRS than they currently do - it is noted that staff resource may be needed to manage the extra take up of SDVRS time.



In the last financial year (1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016):

- Approximately **3440 volunteers** carried out work of benefit to the South Downs National Park's purposes<sup>2</sup>. On average, this equates to 98 volunteers at each of the 35 organisations who provided a figure
- Volunteers contributed approximately **95,120 volunteer days** to work of benefit to the South Downs National Park's purposes<sup>3</sup>. This compares positively to the 91,000 volunteer days reported in the 2012 survey undertaken by Resources 4 Change.

In general, responding organisations had seen volunteer numbers **increase** over the last 5 years (48%).



Base: all who provided a response (42)

<sup>2</sup> To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area and promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the national park by the public.

<sup>3</sup> We only included figures where organisations provided **both number of volunteers and number of volunteer days** figures. This equated to an average of 82 volunteers multiplied by an average of 8 volunteer days multiplied by the 145 organisations that we know of within the National Park that get help from volunteers (note we only had email addresses for 113 of these organisations, despite extensive searching – hence the survey of sample of 113 organisations)

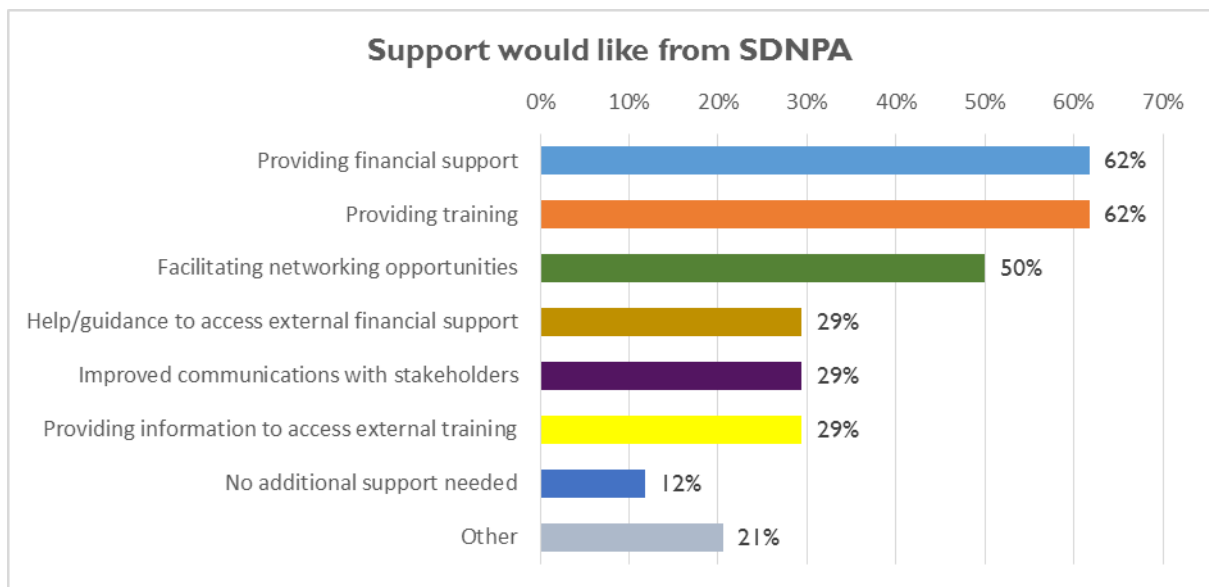


### Recommendations:

- In the 2017 survey include a follow up question of those people who stated their volunteer numbers had increased over the last 5 years, for example: “How many volunteers did you work with five years ago?” This will provide us with more accurate context as they will already have provided data on the current number of volunteers.
- Also include an open question in the 2017 survey asking why organisations think volunteer numbers have increased – e.g. down to a specific targeted campaign, or another reason.

## 5. Additional support requested

Of the suggested different types of support it was proposed SDNPA might be able to provide organisations and / or volunteers, **financial support** and **training** were the most popular (62% both). There was also strong interest (50%) in **facilitating networking opportunities**. The proposed annual volunteer fair (which first took place in 2015) will provide a great networking opportunity; however consideration could also be given to other ways SDNPA could enable organisations to get together in this context.



Base: all who provided a response (34)





Note that **it might also be an opportunity** in the 2017 survey to ask organisations about the level of interest in utilising the SDVRS/utilising the SDVRS more than they currently do, if it is felt that there is capacity within the SDVRS to offer additional support to partner organisations. Alternatively, we could ask organisations what additional support they might need from SDNPA to enable them to provide better opportunities, training etc to their own volunteers.

In the main, 'other' support respondents requested involved **practical help**:

*"Expertise to help us survey a dew pond restored 4 years ago."*

*"Help required with laying a hedge in the Sussex Style."*

*"Pooling resources - both tools and equipment and volunteers."*

*"Transport to help access conservation areas."*

*"Workforce to undertake physical chalk grassland management."*

It also involved support around the **promotion of volunteering**:

*"Help in promoting our volunteer sessions to a wider audience."*

*"Provide a mechanism for us to promote and advertise our activities and events."*

**Recommendation:**

Share the survey findings with the organisations in the contacts database. Ask them to share with us what level of financial support they were looking for and consider whether this is something SDNPA could provide. Also ask people to state what type of training they were looking for, to ascertain whether this is something SDNPA can provide or whether this would need to be outsourced to a third party.

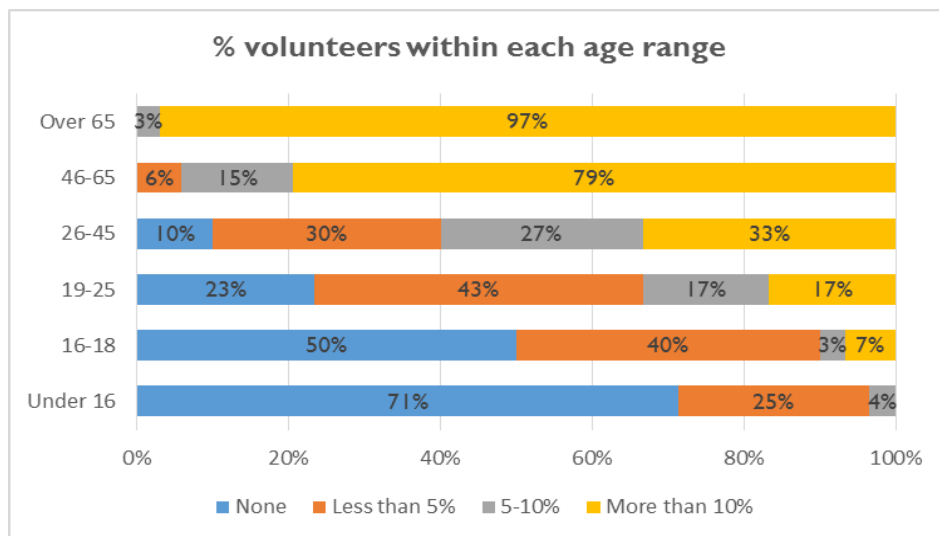




## 6. Volunteer profile

Half of responding organisations (55%) stated that **less than 5%** of their volunteers were from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. A further 42% reported that **none** of their volunteers were from BAME backgrounds.

In the main (see *chart below*), and perhaps unsurprisingly, the highest proportion of volunteers are either **46-65** or **over 65**. With so few volunteers falling into the 18 or under age ranges, this is clearly an area for development.



Base: all who provided a response (34)

### Recommendations:

- Consider ways that we might better engage with people from BAME backgrounds to increase the proportion of people from these groups who volunteer. Work with other organisations to come up with solutions and devise a joint strategic approach
- Engage with organisations that work with young volunteers to learn from their approach to engaging with this age group and share this information with partner organisations. From the perspective of the South Downs National Park Authority, our volunteering figures for this younger age group are likely to increase once we join the UK National Parks' Youth MOSAIC programme which will have dedicated staff resource behind it.



## 7. Additional comments

A number of organisations provided further comments about volunteering activity in the SDNP and/or how we can work together to better support volunteers, for example:

- Better promotion of the SDRVS role
- Improved communications
- More networking
- More sharing of equipment.

*“Equipment check out service/storage for organisations across the park. Minibus sharing scheme for volunteer work parties. Volunteer outreach officer to support volunteering. in the National Park across all organisations. "How to" guide on accessing available funding. Training and development opportunities to up-skill volunteers.”*

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## Appendix I: free text comments

**Q1: Which of the following best describes the organisation you are representing? – Other, please specify**

- Government

**Q2: What is the MAIN category of work that volunteers undertake? – Other, please specify**

- Accommodation
- Animal Welfare
- Combination of first three (access & rec; community support; countryside mment and cons)
- Shopping trips
- Station Projects

**Q3: What OTHER categories of work do volunteers undertake? – Other, please specify**

- Fundraising, events, guest assistance
- Maintaining traditional woodland and green woodworking skills.
- Visitor Experience
- Winter "Lookering" and Surveys



**Q4: What types of work do your volunteers undertake? – Other, please specify**

- Driving and escorting
- Fundraising, awareness raising, children's club, events
- Medical/Veterinary
- Reviving and maintaining traditional crafts.

**Q9: Please indicate whether your organisation/volunteers would be interested in any support SDNPA might be able to provide – Other, please specify**

- Expertise to help us survey a dew pond restored 4 years ago
- Help in promoting our volunteer sessions to a wider audience
- Help required with laying a hedge in the Sussex Style
- Pooling resources - both tools and equipment and volunteers
- Provide a mechanism for us to promote and advertise our activities and events.
- Transport to help access conservation areas
- Workforce to undertake physical chalk grassland management.

**Q10: If you have any further comments to make about volunteering activity in the South Downs National Park and / or how we can work together to better support volunteers, then please provide them below:**

- Better communication and networking opportunities would be useful. A better understanding of what SDNP volunteers do would also be useful
- Encourage young people to get involved in nature conservation through involvement in the natural world
- Equipment check out service/storage for organisations across the park. Minibus sharing scheme for volunteer work parties. Volunteer outreach officer to support volunteering



in the National Park across all organisations. "How to" guide on accessing available funding. Training and development opportunities to up-skill volunteers.

- Help with co-ordination of voluntary work based on our geographical areas and specialisms. Possibly provide groups with additional volunteers if required.
  - It is most helpful that the SDNP vols turn up and help us maintain and expand our heathland. I am very happy with the way things are.
  - It would be really great to look at ways to work more closely together.
  - Just very grateful for the support provided which enables our group members to engage in activities that they would be unlikely to access otherwise. We have had support to get mental health service users outdoors for ecotherapy/conservation activities (transport onto the Downs and practical advice and support from a local Ranger). All involved have reported how beneficial it has been to them.
  - Main help would be with promoting to and finding new volunteers
  - Only part of the area in which we work is in the SDNP. Perhaps 10% of the 100 volunteer days reported earlier are actually in the SDNP, the same percentage as the SDNP area
  - The map on which to show volunteering vacancies is very useful
  - When help is asked for please can you respond/acknowledge request.
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