

Case Study

Wessex Archaeology: Scheduled Monuments Data and Evidence Review

Background

Scheduled Monuments are nationally important archaeological sites, protected by legislation and selected based on characteristics including rarity, survival, condition and potential.

Scheduled Monuments cover every period of human history and come in a variety of forms; from visible buildings or field monuments, such as barrows and earthworks, to invisible buried remains. The variety of monuments makes them both a unique and fragile reflection of our human history.

Despite legislation for their protection, Scheduled Monuments remain vulnerable to damage and decline. Detrimental impacts to Scheduled Monuments remain varied, but most commonly they are the result of damaging farming practices (both historic and current), erosion caused by livestock, damaging activities by burrowing animals, neglect, or erosion or damage as a result of human interventions.

Damage can be caused by a lack of awareness of a site's legal protections, but purposeful destruction through activities including metal detecting or willful site damage also occur.

There are 575 Scheduled Monuments in the South Downs National Park. A further 18 are within 100km of the National Park boundary and represent related or associated monuments.



Cissbury Ring, a Scheduled Monument owned and cared for by the National Trust - an exemplar for holistic site management benefitting wildlife and for heritage.

The project

Working in partnership with the National Trust and the RSPB, and with support from Historic England, the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) commissioned Wessex Archaeology to undertake a data and evidence review to better understand the current condition of Scheduled Monuments across the National Park based on existing data. The key headlines were:

- Within the South Downs National Park around 30% of the Scheduled Monuments are *Optimal/ Generally Satisfactory*.
- 41% of Scheduled Monuments in the National Park are identified as *Vulnerable*. A number of these have a declining trend.
- There are 39 Scheduled Monuments within the South Downs National Park identified on the 'Heritage At Risk Register', representing 6.8% of the total Scheduled Monuments within the National Park's boundary.
- Principle vulnerabilities identified show that vegetation damage is the main area of concern within the National Park, followed by adverse agricultural practices.

The Data and Evidence Review has been the first in-depth analysis to understand the nuanced issues around Scheduled Monument condition, the opportunities that could arise from multi partner working, and the collaborative approaches that might improve resourcing for Scheduled Monument monitoring.

The project was awarded £11,382.50 by SDNPA.

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“A review of the existing data sources has shown that while information is held about these assets by a number of different organisations, this information is not systematically collated or shared... This has potentially serious repercussions for the protection and management of these features and means that resources are not being used as effectively as they could be.”

Wessex Archaeology

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The outcome

All partners had a shared wish to see a consistent, data driven approach to monitoring and recording, and acknowledged the risks around the inconsistent and under resourced protocols currently in place.

As a result of the findings, SDNPA, the National Trust and the RSPB will be submitting a funding bid to Historic England in late 2021 / early 2022 for a multi-year project to:

- Establish a consistent approach to monitoring and recording across the South Downs National Park.
- Provide training and development opportunities to staff and community archaeology societies to undertake monitoring and recording activities.
- Create Management Plans for vulnerable Scheduled Monuments in the National Park.
- Establish data sharing protocols.
- Explore ways of engaging a wider variety of local people in the care and monitoring of Scheduled sites (including exploring opportunities such as ‘Adopt a Monument’ schemes.
- Identify and capitalise on opportunities to dovetail activities with other landscape scale projects in the National Park.

The Report enables the funding submission to be well evidenced, targeting the particular areas for improvement highlighted as a result of the research.

The future

The project was delivered wholly through virtual meetings with all partners and Wessex Archaeology, a notable point of success given the impacts of the pandemic.

The quality of the end report was also a testament to the strength of the project communications, enabling all parties to feel empowered to have open conversations.

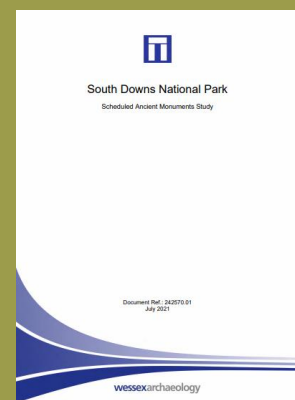
The particular strength of the overall project was the quality of the brief, which was considered clear and easy to understand, with specified parameters ensuring the project did not experience ‘scope creep’.

The review brought together a large number of data sets for the first time, and provides a well-evidenced and clear ‘situation review’ that will act as a baseline for both the development and evaluation of future projects.

For further information, please contact:

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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 4.1: Increase conservation, awareness, access to and understanding of South Downs cultural heritage

southdowns.gov.uk/partnership-management-plan/

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