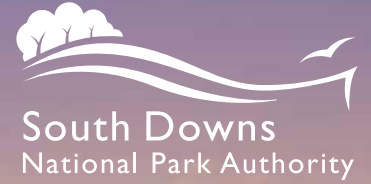


ANNUAL REVIEW 2022/23



A YEAR OF CHANGE IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

As we move into a post-pandemic era, it's clear that National Parks have never been more important, and never been so needed, for a nation grappling with a wide array of economic, environmental, health, social and international challenges.

The South Downs National Park remains one of the UK's vital "green lungs" and a place where nature and people can come together in this most treasured landscape that inspires, excites, nourishes and creates. Partnership working and collaboration have been particularly important this year and, combined with tremendous hard work from our staff, Members and volunteers, this means there is so much to celebrate. Just a couple of years on from the launch of our ReNature initiative, we're leading the way on nature recovery - with 4,716ha of habitat improved or created for biodiversity.

Almost 6,000 schoolchildren, many from cities with little access to green space, have enjoyed visiting and exploring the National Park, thanks to our grants for schools and colleges.

We're proud to have introduced six new mobility scooters at key sites, creating opportunities for everyone to be able to explore the outdoors and take home those memories of a "great day-out" in a National Park. Wherever you are, and whoever you are, everyone should be able to enjoy the South Downs National Park.

Farmers are the lifeblood of this National Park and we're pleased to have been able to successfully deliver Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme – helping over 70 unique initiatives that have taken a share of around £1m, with projects varying from nature-friendly farming to leading-edge diversification.



We're pleased to have been able to oversee the Community Infrastructure Levy, with 38 community schemes sharing just under £2m for projects such as new school playgrounds, new access paths and river restoration. Good planning delivers widescale, far-reaching benefits and this will be particularly important with mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain on the horizon. The National Park is already innovating and hopes to utilise this planning shift to help nature and make the South Downs an even better place to live, work and visit.

The list of achievements, breakthroughs and successes is long and none of it would have been possible without the support of local businesses, landowners, farmers, volunteers, charities, residents and community groups who share our commitment to protecting and enhancing the South Downs.

As Britain's youngest National Park, ambition is something we have never shied away from and we're proud to set the bar high. Our new high-level targets demonstrate that desire to make a real difference.

They include securing an additional 13,000ha, or 33% of land managed for nature from a baseline of 25%, and making the whole of the National Park nature friendly by 2030. We are also targeting a 5% reduction, per annum, in the overall carbon footprint of the South Downs National Park from the baseline reported in 2019.

Amid an uncertain economic climate, the challenges undoubtedly remain but we know that now is the time for bold action. The SDNPA, its communities, visitors and

partners stand ready to help deliver our national response to two of the defining crises of our time – nature depletion and climate change.

We hope you enjoy reading this Annual Review that captures the wide spectrum of the Authority's work to conserve and enhance this beautiful National Park and improve understanding and awareness of this special place.



Trevor Beattie
Chief Executive



Vanessa Rowlands
Chair

This Annual Review highlights some of our key achievements for 2022/23 which link to the objectives laid out in our *Corporate Plan 2022/23*

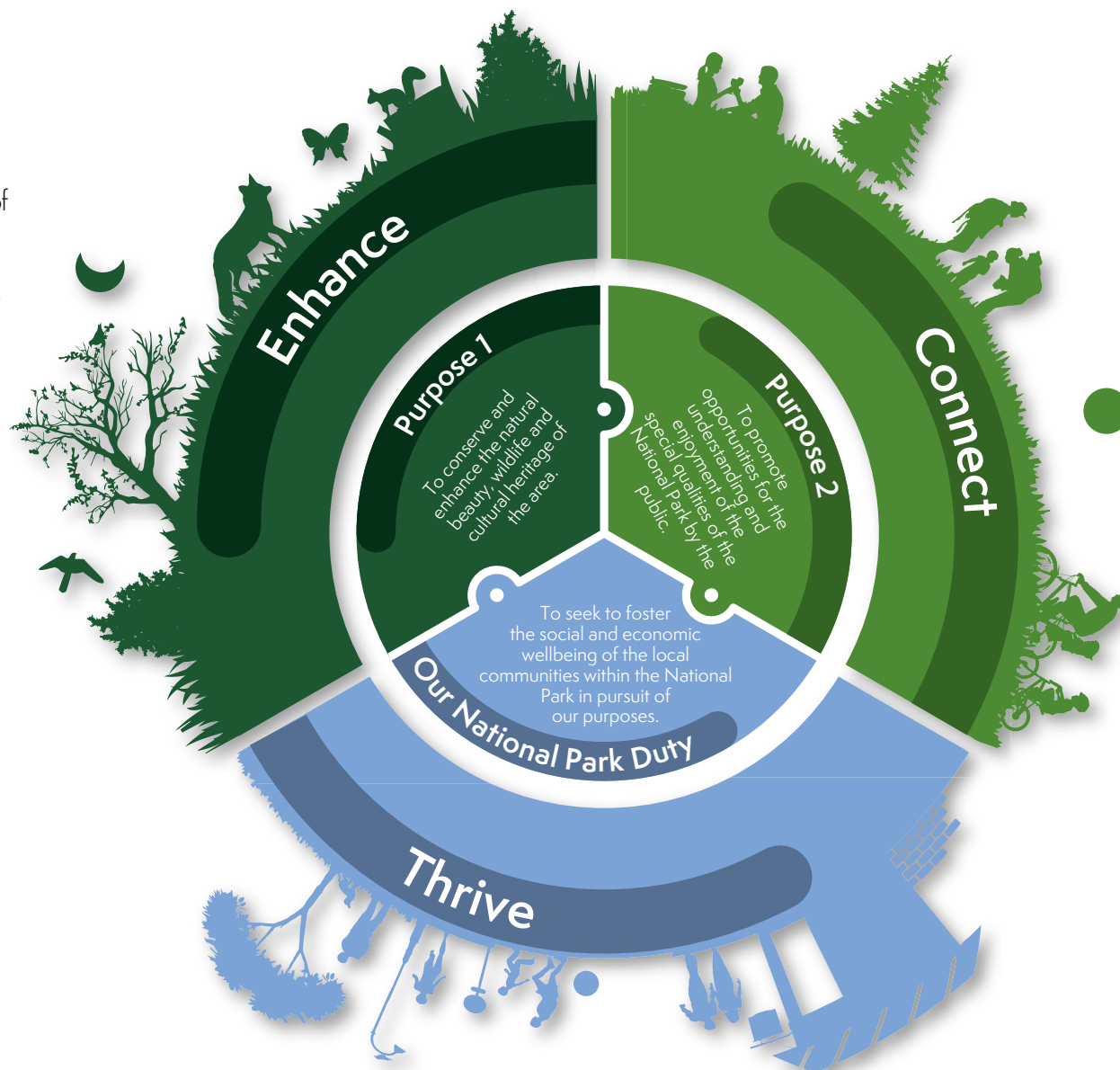
Cover image: © Matthew Thomas – Washington Chalk Pits, Wiston Estate



OUR PURPOSES AND DUTY

Our role as the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) is clearly defined by Parliament in our statutory Purposes and Duty.

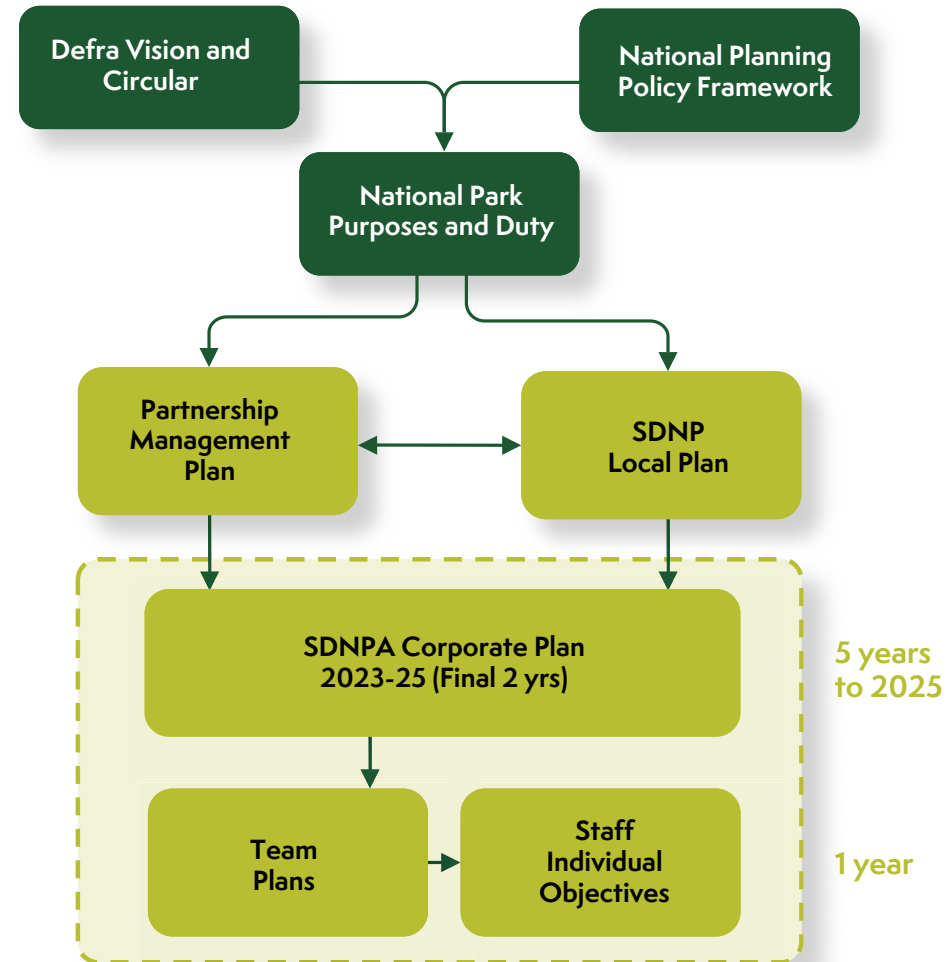
- **Our first Purpose is:** To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.
- **Our second Purpose is:** To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.
- **The Duty on the SDNPA is:** To seek to foster the social and economic wellbeing of the local communities within the National Park in pursuit of our purposes.



THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH WE WORK

The diagram below sets out the policy and strategic framework steering the work of the South Downs National Park Authority. 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**.



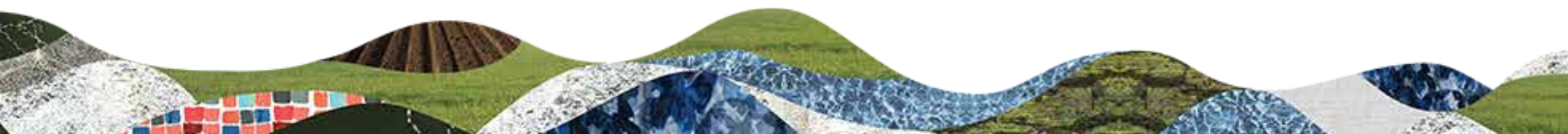
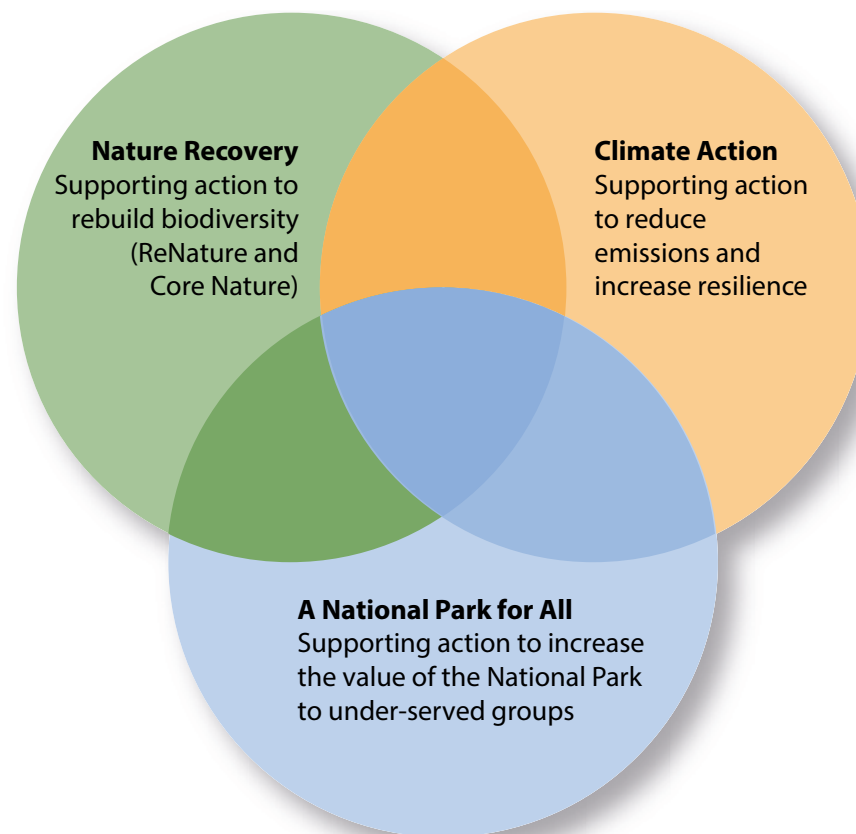
HIGH LEVEL TARGETS

The long-term ambitions of the Partnership Management Plan (PMP) are very broad, but for the next three years the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) will come under increasing financial pressure as rising inflation outstrips a flat cash funding settlement.

It is therefore essential that we focus on those areas where we know we can make the most impact against the priorities in the PMP, the Public Affairs Strategy and Government's Glover response. This does not mean abandoning the whole range of the PMP. We will maintain the breadth of its ambition with the associated partnerships so that we can respond swiftly when circumstances change and/or funding is secured. This Corporate Plan shows how we will make a greater impact with fewer, but better targeted, resources while maximising our potential to raise private and charitable finance. It is for this reason that we put in place a single set of high-level targets for this Corporate Plan. This is how we will measure the overall effectiveness of the SDNPA between 2022 and 2025 in terms of its impact on the ground. We will expect every team to maximise its contribution towards these targets.

- HLT1: To secure an additional 13,000ha, or 33% of land managed for nature by 2030 from a baseline of 25%
- HLT2: Maintain, enhance and/or restore existing key sites, habitats and species.
- HLT3: South Downs National Park Authority to reduce its carbon footprint by 150 tonnes per annum in line with the 2030 net zero target
- HLT4: 5% reduction per annum in the overall carbon footprint of the South Downs National Park from the baseline reported in 2019

- HLT5: Increase the diversity of visitors to, and those engaging with, the South Downs National Park.
- HLT6: To be devised: an impact measure for direct engagement.



SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK KEY ACHIEVEMENTS FROM 2022/23

FARMING IN A PROTECTED LANDSCAPE (FiPL)

26

...projects approved were awarded **£383,822**



FARMING

178

...farmers in **6** farm clusters covering 2/3 of the NP



CIL FUNDING

£412k

...awarded to **9** projects



RURAL ECONOMY

152

...members Our South Downs business network

19

...Green South Downs Sustainability Certified businesses



PLANNING APPLICATIONS

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



16%

Affordable housing
...of homes built in the National Park

NATIONAL PARK FOR ALL

EDUCATION

5,830

...school children from our more deprived communities visited thanks to our grants for schools and colleges



25

YOUTH ACTION
days

...engaging **172** young people in positive environmental action



VOLUNTEER RANGERS

369 Rangers spent...

1,587

...days supporting national park work

104

...hours spent by **13** wardens surveying and minor maintenance

SOUTH DOWNS WAY

3 new Waymarkers

11

...gates repaired

2

...gates replaced

MOBILITY SCOOTERS

6 ...for hire at 5 locations.



WRITER IN RESIDENCE

...at Seven Sisters:

106

...creatives, artists & specialists



144

...participants

New products or commissions: **53**
Number of days employment: **220**

SOCIAL MEDIA REACH

79,349 +10% ↗
Total followers

20.3% ↗
Youtube subscribers

WEBSITE VISITORS

1.60m 2% ↗
unique visits

10,638 21% ↗

E-NEWSLETTER
signups to date

EVENTS & ENGAGEMENT VIRTUAL

741k Total content reach

37k Video views

IN-PERSON ENGAGEMENT

5,091

at Pop Up Events ReNature and Dark Skies Festival. Over **600** ReNature packs sent to community groups

NATURE RECOVERY & CLIMATE ACTION

404ha NEW habitat created for nature during 2022/23*

Habitat IMPROVED for nature during 2022/23* **4,312ha**

TOTAL TREES

16,383

...planted in 2022/23 covering approx. **98ha**



24.5km

HEDGEROW
restored/created

PONDS

14 restored/created/maintained



BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

35% ...on largest scale development sites

iNATURALIST/NPUK LOOK WILD PROJECT

23,059

...species observations were made inside the SDNP by **1,069** observers clocking up a total of **11,530** volunteer hours



*From previously committed land

CASE STUDY: SEVEN SISTERS

After a winter of building works, spring/summer 2022 saw the buildings at Exceat, Seven Sisters Country Park, open to the public – newly refurbished and with a new team of enthusiastic National Park staff.

The Easter weekend 2022 saw the opening of the visitor centre and new toilet facilities, including a Changing Places toilet and two accessible toilets. In late May the new 'Grab and Go' opened its door offering a selection of snacks, light lunches, hot and cold drinks and pots of ice cream. In both the visitor centre's retail space and the Grab and Go, there has been a focus on supporting local businesses; 87% of all products stocked come from within or close to the National Park with a focus on sustainability and minimising plastic waste.

Out on the park the landscape team have continued to make improvements to the habitats and site access. The new 4.8 mile 'Country Park Trail' was opened in spring 2023, taking in all the rare habitats the Country Park has to offer and encouraging visitors to explore lesser known parts of the Country Park.

Cattle and ponies have continued to graze the site, targeting the chalk grassland in the winter months and the wet grasslands in the summer months. This has meant an increase the diversity of plants and the eco-systems that are reliant on them. Future plans will seek to restore the ponds at Foxhole and New Barn, allowing them to provide an important source of fresh water for wildlife.

In time for summer, work will finish at Foxhole campsite and cottages. Bookings are already coming in from education groups keen to bring children to spend a night under the National Park's dark skies.

2022-23 also saw significant investment in improving accessibility at the Country Park with the arrival of; 2 off-road mobility scooters, multiple accessible benches, a chair lift and accessible canoes to provide access to the meanders and a selection of accessible bikes.

The work to improve Seven Sisters doesn't stop and exciting plans are developing to further improve the site for people, nature and also to minimise our own carbon footprint.



© Shelley Comes – view of the Seven Sisters from Hope Gap

© SDNPA

SEVEN SISTERS
SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

CASE STUDY: CHANGING CHALK

The four year Changing Chalk project is a partnership of organisations working together for a sustainable future for the South Downs. Led by the National Trust, the project is supported by a £2.23m National Lottery Heritage Fund grant and funding from People's Postcode Lottery and The Linbury Trust.

The project will connect nature, people and heritage by restoring lost landscapes and habitats, bringing history to life and offering new experiences in the outdoors. Working with the communities of Brighton & Hove, Eastbourne and Lewes the project aims to protect and restore the Downs landscape for people to enjoy for health and wellbeing, for nature recovery and for climate resilience.

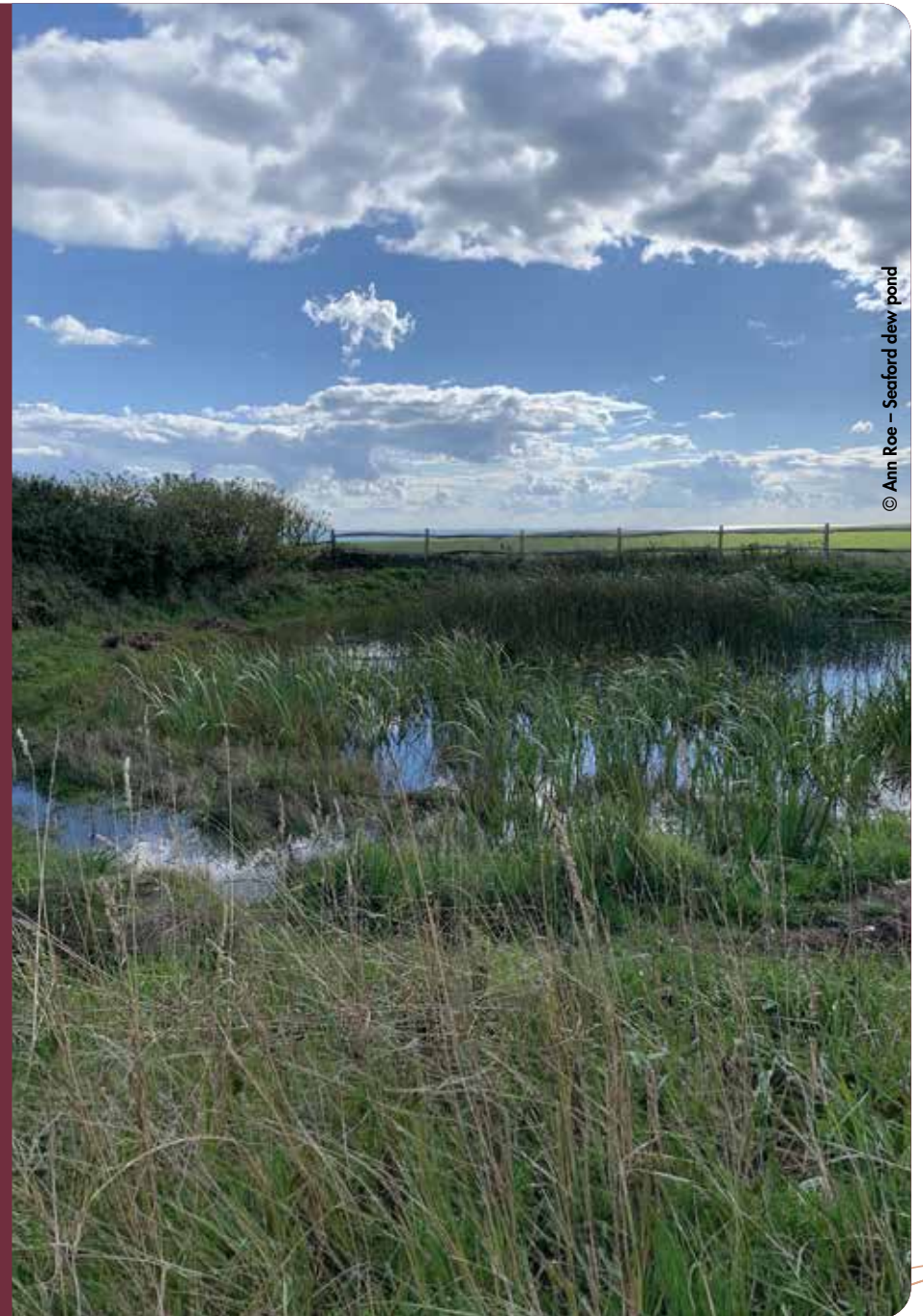
Much of the Changing Chalk project area falls within the South Downs National Park. Chalk downland is a big part of what makes the South Downs so special. It is a mosaic of habitat comprising of chalk grassland, chalk streams and chalk heaths. In just one square meter of chalk grassland, up to 40 different species can be found – practically a rainforest in miniature. Although common in England, globally it is very rare. These grassy downlands are the result of forest clearing as far back as Neolithic and Bronze Age times, grazed by sheep for centuries.

The SDNPA is delivering 2 of the 18 projects of Changing Chalk. At the end of the first year, we have achieved:

- Supporting conservation grazing at a landscape scale, through the establishment of multiple grazing hubs
142 hectares under improved grazing management (Yr1 target: 130ha)
- Restoring 5 key dew ponds in the Eastern Downs to provide water for grazing animals and much-needed havens for wildlife
1 dewpond restoration (Yr1 target: 1 dew pond restored)

You can find out more about the project on the **Changing Chalk website**.

Project partners: National Trust, Brighton and Hove City Council, Brighton and Hove Food Partnership, The Living Coast Biosphere, Natural England, Lewes Railway Land Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Buglife, Lewes and Eastbourne Councils.



© Ann Roe – Seaford dew pond

PURPOSE 1:

Enhance

Develop strategies and support or lead strategic overarching partnerships and projects that deliver the first Purpose of National Parks: **to conserve wildlife, the natural beauty of the landscape and cultural heritage.**

Progress against some of our key priorities as laid out in the Corporate Plan 2022/23 are summarised below:

WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO IN OUR CORPORATE PLAN	WHAT WE HAVE DONE
<p>ReNature the South Downs National Park</p>	<p>The South Downs Nature Recovery Programme continues through a variety of mechanisms.</p> <p>We have registered approximately 368 initiatives on the nature recovery log which are contributing towards Corporate Plan ReNature targets. This equates to 4,716ha of habitat improved or created for biodiversity for 2022/23.</p> <p>Planning and delivery has involved collaboration with a variety of partners and audiences including businesses, community groups, conservation organisations, local authorities, estates, education institutions, farmers, parishes and private landowners.</p> <p>In addition, there are 10 CIL/S106 initiatives that contribute towards nature recovery (ReNature) and a 35% average Biodiversity Net Gain on largest scale development sites.</p>
<p>Better connect people with nature</p>	<p>Our hybrid engagement, combining in-person events and digital engagement and content, has enabled us to reach more people than ever before. This shows us that people care about nature and want to know what they can do to help. For more information about hybrid engagement, see the National Parks for All section.</p>

WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO IN OUR CORPORATE PLAN	WHAT WE HAVE DONE
<p>Work towards our Net-Zero target for the South Downs National Park</p>	<p>As well as discussions with partners regarding development of the SDNPA approach to offsetting the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions that it can't reduce; SDNPA's latest actions have been looking at fossil fuel use in SDNPA vehicles. Members of the sustainability group have arranged for an EV 4WD demo after undertaking research with Ranger staff and Seven Sisters Country Park staff to evaluate its ability and application.</p> <p>In December 2022, SDNPA submitted a bid for funding to Innovate UK to develop a common framework to track and accelerate progress towards Net Zero in National Parks using the One Planet Platform Funding bid to Innovate UK was successful, and the pilot project due to start on the 1st April 2023. It is one of thirty UK projects under the 'Pathfinder Places' programme. Plans for a national roll-out to the UK National Park family are also in development as part of a bigger Phase 2 bid for July 2023.</p>
<p>Work towards our Net Zero target for the South Downs National Park Authority</p>	<p>A scheme of 'Invest to Save' works were presented to the NPA on 30th March 2023 for approval. These works include replacing the lighting in the SDC and SSCP office for LED units, new PV panels for the Memorial Hall and SSCP. Following approval at NPA these works will be completed (subject to Planning consent) in 2023/2024. Carbon Accounting reporting will feed into the new proposal to monitor emission reduction targets across the Defra group.</p>



NATURE RECOVERY

HIGH LEVEL TARGETS

- To secure an additional **13,000ha**, or **33%** of land managed for nature by 2030 from a baseline of **25%**
- **Maintain, enhance and/or restore** existing key sites, habitats and species

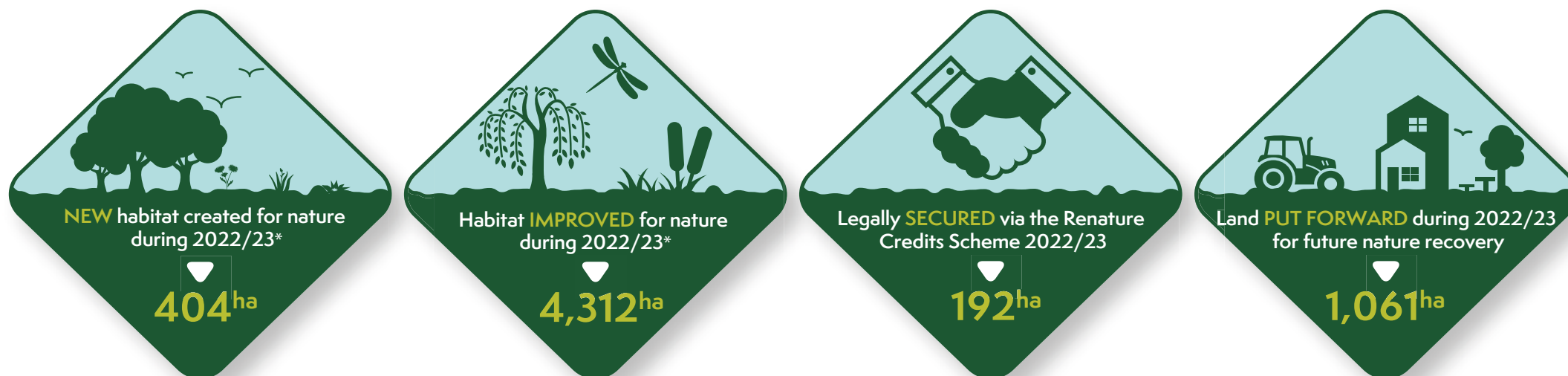
INTRODUCTION

The South Downs Nature Recovery Programme has continued through a variety of mechanisms. Delivery successes have involved collaboration with a variety of partners and audiences including businesses, community groups, conservation organisations, local authorities, estates, education institutions, farmers, parishes and private landowners.

For 2022/23, we have registered approximately **368 initiatives** on our 'Nature Recovery Log' which are contributing towards our Corporate Plan targets.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Nature Recovery delivery is a long-term process ranging from first identifying a potential site, through habitat improvement and creation and ultimately towards quality nature recovery having been achieved.



*From previously committed land

NEW HABITATS CREATED FOR BIODIVERSITY

ReNature delivery has progressed through key initiatives such as Call for Nature Sites and Beelines, and Nature Based Solutions projects through the creation of new ponds, wildflower meadows and a farm restoration scheme.

CALL FOR NATURE SITES

The Call for Nature Sites (C4NS) initiative was launched in November 2021 to stimulate interest and sites to support the South Downs Nature Recovery ambitions. At the time, this generated 77 Expressions of Interest. 41 initiatives have been or are currently being progressed largely through Nature Based Solutions, Beelines, Trees for the Downs or the ReNature Grant. A further 17 are “amber” which means they are more complex to deliver. The remainder did not qualify.

As an example of action undertaken in 2022/23, we have tracked a total of up to an estimated 312ha of habitat creation from the C4NS initiatives predominantly through a Nature Based Solutions farm restoration (307ha) involving the creation of future woodland, scrubland and lowland meadows. The Trees for the Downs schemes alone equate to approximately 3,000 trees.

This has been delivered through a variety of audiences/ stakeholders including Parish Councils, farmers, private landowners, conservation groups and colleges. A couple of large estates/ private landowners are progressing via the Nature Based Solutions route.

HABITATS IMPROVED FOR BIODIVERSITY

Habitat improvements have primarily progressed via FiPL funding and the Changing Chalk project led by the National Trust along with volunteering and SDNPA led and externally led projects at SSCP, Grandfather's Bottom (located at Butser Hill) and Lullington Heath.

Work has included management of grass verges, chalk grassland management, conservation grazing, tree planting, scrub management, field margins, woodland management, hedge gapping up, removing non-native species and deer

management practices including fencing. Although action has been taken, it will take (in some cases) may years for quality nature recovery to be realised.

- Estimated **16,383** trees planted covering approximately 98ha as part of Trees for the Downs (2022/23)
- Ponds: **14** created/restored/maintained (2022/23)
- Estimated **24.5km** of hedgerow restored/created during 2021/22 to 2022/23

LULLINGTON HEATH NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE (NNR)

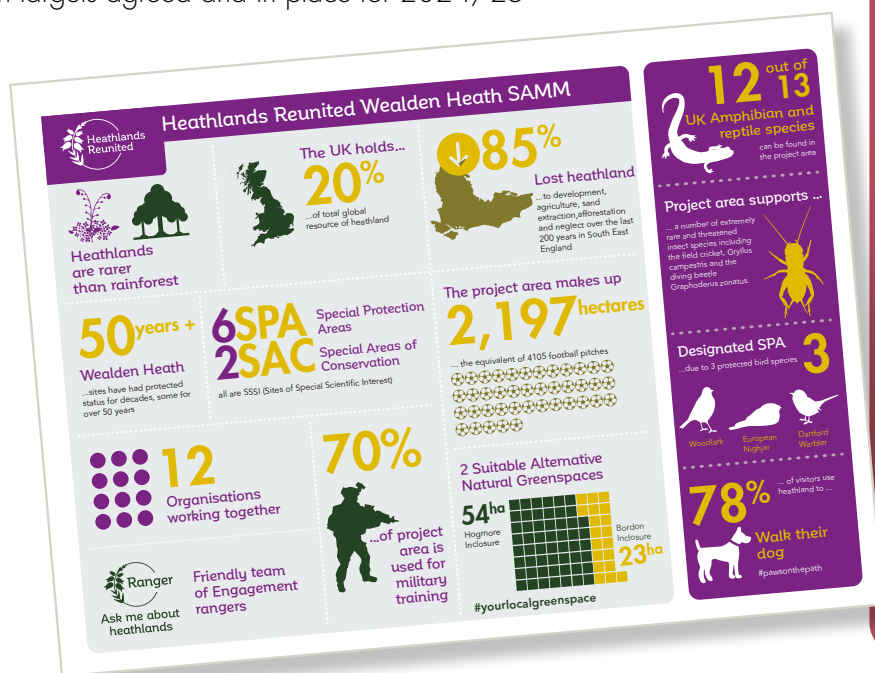
Lullington Heath NNR is situated in the South Downs between the villages of Jevington and Litlington. This project, led by Natural England and supported by the South Downs National Park Authority, to restore the only substantial example of chalk heath left in the South Downs, and one of the few remaining in Britain. Over four years, the heath has undergone major scrub clearance and increased grazing to allow the regeneration of chalk heath and chalk grassland habitat. Vast areas of invasive dense Gorse have been removed and the cleared heath is showing good signs of recovery. Visually the landscape has been restored almost completely.

The chalk heath is special because it is extremely rare for acid soils to appear on top of chalk, as they do here. A unique mixture of heathers and heathland plants such as tormentil grow amongst chalk-loving plants, including thyme and salad burnet. These attract butterflies including grayling and grizzled skipper. Time will be required for the habitat to establish as the project now enters a maintenance phase. Pony grazing on site is continuing and yielding excellent results. The ponies are exceeding expectations in controlling the regrowth of the Gorse and will be absolutely key to restoring the precious Chalk Heath Habitat.

In addition to the above, there are **10 CIL/S106 initiatives** that contribute towards nature recovery (ReNature) and a **35% average Biodiversity Net Gain** via planning on largest scale development sites.

LOOKING AHEAD

- To continue with the Nature Recovery Programme using multiple mechanisms (eg grants, projects, green finance, agri-environment schemes inc FiPL, and through Planning) and in collaboration with multiple partners and stakeholders.
- To take forward the requirements of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) which goes live in November 2023.
- To engage with and support the development of three Local Nature Recovery Strategies: Hampshire, West Sussex and East Sussex with Brighton and Hove. For the SDNPA to fulfil its role as a Supporting Authority.
- Refresh the SDNPA Biodiversity Monitoring Framework (BMF) to further improve our monitoring (ability to measure success) capability and further developing systems to support monitoring and reporting. This will include celebrating success with appropriate case studies underpinned by data and evidence. There is also an investment required to support appropriate systems being put in place such as field maps and LandApp.
- To develop a Species Recovery strand to the Nature Recovery Programme of Work, with targets agreed and in place for 2024/25



OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

WEALDEN HEATH SAMM

The 'Heathlands Reunited Wealden Heath SAMM' project, which started in spring 2021, has brought together 12 like-minded organisations to protect the Wealden Heaths Special Protection Areas (SPA). The project, which is funded by East Hampshire District Council and Whitehill Town Council, aims to promote bigger, better, joined up heathland. The Wealden Heath SPA is home to many rare species and the breeding site for three threatened ground nesting bird species: Dartford Warbler, European Nightjar and the Woodlark. As well as protecting fragile habitat, the project aims to inform, engage and involve communities to use their local heathland in a responsible and sustainable way southdowns.gov.uk/help-your-heaths.

The town of Whitehill & Bordon (W&B) is undergoing major transformation to become a green, healthy, and connected town. The ambitious regeneration programme will deliver around 3,350 new homes, 5,500 new jobs, a new town centre and a new leisure centre, along with associated infrastructure such as new education, health, and leisure facilities. The town developments are within 5km of the Wealden Heaths Phase II Special Protection Area and Shortheath Common Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The SPA is designated for its three species of ground-nesting birds - nightjar, woodlark, and Dartford warbler - which critically depend on lowland heathland.

The project team at SDNPA have been responsible for

- access management of the sites
- the provision of public Engagement Rangers to carry out site patrols and provide a positive presence across the sites
- the delivery a programme of public engagement activities, campaigns and events
- site monitoring - SPA monitoring and survey requirements (i.e. Visitor surveys, car park counts, bird surveys and habitat surveys)

So far the team have engaged with 4,245 people in the areas surrounding Whitehill and Bordon through events and activities to promote sustainable and responsible use of the Special Protection Area.

The team hope to bring about a change in dog walker behaviour on Heathland sites, increase the knowledge of the importance of heathland amongst local communities, and co-ordinate partnership working and consistence across Heathland Sites.

The project will run until 2025.

CLIMATE ACTION

HIGH LEVEL TARGET

- South Downs National Park Authority to reduce its carbon footprint by **150 tonnes** per annum in line with the 2030 net zero target

INTRODUCTION

The South Downs National Park Authority continues to design and implement initiatives to reduce its carbon footprint. A scheme of 'Invest to Save' works were approved by the National Park Authority meeting in Spring 2023. These works include:

- replacing the lighting in the South Downs Centre (SDC), Midhurst, and Seven Sisters County Park (SSCP) office with LED units
- New solar electricity panels, also known as photovoltaics (PV) panels, for the SDC Memorial Hall and SSCP

Following approval at NPA, these works will be completed (subject to Planning consent) in 2023/2024.

ACHIEVEMENTS

There has been a **decrease** in our greenhouse gas emissions based on SDC and our area offices. Emissions (tonnes of CO₂) were down -3.1% (from 266.57t in 2021/22 to 258.3t in 2022/23). This is due to the continuing implementation of the 'new ways of working project', allowing staff to only spend 50% of their working time in an SDNPA office. This reduction can also be attributed to the post COVID re-opening of the area offices to non-area staff as staff can now choose to work from one of the three area offices instead of travelling into Midhurst.

However, due to the opening of the new visitors centre and offices at SSCP, there has been an overall **increase** in SDNPA greenhouse gas emissions of 6.1% (total 283.01t). An increase next year also looks likely as work has taken place on refurbishing visitor accommodation at Foxhole Cottages which will receive booked guests this year. When works and improvements are completed at Seven Sisters Country Park, we will look to establish a new Park-wide baseline.

LOOKING AHEAD

SDNPA carbon accounting reporting will feed into the new proposal to monitor emission reduction targets across the Defra group.

HIGH LEVEL TARGET

- **5%** reduction per annum in the overall carbon footprint of the South Downs National Park from the baseline reported in 2019

INTRODUCTION

In February 2022 the SDNPA re-affirmed the Authority's commitment to addressing the climate and nature emergency by;

- Agreeing to work with our constituent Local Authorities and other partners, in particular local communities and landowners, to deliver actions that respond effectively to the climate and nature emergency;
- Working towards the South Downs National Park becoming 'Net-Zero with Nature' by 2040.

The following are some of the key projects SDNPA has supported and developed as part of the Climate Action Programme during 2022/23:

COMMUNITY ENERGY PATHWAY

Supporting local communities to develop community-based energy projects. The project provided mentoring and advice to early adopters and for local

communities considering renewable and retrofit projects through to the submission of external funding bids.

SDNPA CARBON BASELINE WORK

Develop a shared baseline and methodology for monitoring progress toward Net-Zero. The South Downs National Park Authority are piloting the work prior to roll out across the other UK National Parks.

WECAN PROJECT

This community 'carbon-zero' project was funded by SDNPA to support and develop community-based 'Net-Zero' plans, aided by the adoption of the IMPACT carbon assessment tool.

PECAN 'WHOLE HOUSE' RETROFIT PROJECT

The SDNPA has been supporting this project with match-funding since June 2021. The principal delivery partner is **Petersfield Climate Action Network (PeCAN)**, an environmental community group with a mission to help Petersfield and surrounding villages reduce carbon emission and protect nature. The project is just coming to the end of its two year funding.

The project set out to develop and test a non-profit expert retrofit advice service by providing retrofit services to 300 local households over two years (150 in the Petersfield area, 150 in Winchester). The project delivered retrofit plans for householders and provided support with installation to a mix of able-to-pay and low-income / vulnerable households.

In addition, the project helped to build capacity of a passionate and dynamic community group to develop other projects that reduce carbon emissions and protect nature.

PeCAN secured funding from the National Energy Foundation (NEF) and the Energy Savings Trust (EST) to deliver the project. The overall grant for the delivery of the project was £750K. The £33,000 of match funding from SDNPA enabled to secure a project co-ordinator to effectively direct this inward investment. It also supported PeCAN to extend the scope of volunteer capacity within Parishes and local groups to enhance community resilience to climate change.

LOOKING AHEAD

In October 2022 Ouse Valley Climate Action was awarded £2m from the National Lottery Community Fund, aiming to make the region a national pioneer in tackling the climate change emergency.

The East Sussex partnership covers 10 organisations, including the South Downs National Park Trust and Authority and Lewes District Council, and has an ambitious goal of empowering local people to help create one of the first communities in England to fully embrace climate action.

The project area follows the River Ouse downstream from the village of Barcombe – which is aiming to be the UK's first net-zero village – through to Lewes, the National Park's largest town, and further south to the coastal towns of Seaford, Peacehaven, and Newhaven.

The Climate Change Action Plan for 2023/24 was approved by Members in February 2023. The priority areas for delivery are:

- Work with the wider National Parks family to establish the NPAs as leaders in meeting the challenge presented by Climate Change;
- Delivering 'Net Zero with Nature' – Linking the high-level targets and Climate Action and understanding the carbon contribution of our nature recovery work;
- Delivering Climate Action through the Planning System;
- Supporting the Land-based sector to transition to a low-carbon future;
- Working with our local communities – supporting them to become more resilient;
- Working with our Local Authorities and Sector Partners to deliver positive action;
- Support rural businesses to adapt their business operations and transition to a low-carbon economy.



OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS: ENHANCE

FARM CARBON PROJECT

The Farm Carbon project, working in partnership with Stephen Woodley (agronomist and advisor), aimed to work with farmers, farmer clusters and other partners across the SDNP to establish baseline data for soil quality and farm carbon budgets.

As part of the data collection element of the project, site visits were completed to all **18 participating farms**. As well as the 'in-field' tests, e.g. earthworm counts and VESS (Visual Evaluation of Soil Structure), soil samples were sent to the NRM laboratory to be analysed for trace elements, organic matter and carbon content.

All participating farms have now received reports detailing their soil analysis results and have created a carbon budget for their holding using the Farm Carbon Toolkit. The results generated are being used to identify and develop practical measures that individual farms, farmer clusters and the wider farming community can take to improve their soils and carbon footprints; aided by the implementation of the Farm Carbon calculator across the Farm Cluster groups in the SDNPA.

The results of this project will also represent a baseline from which to plan future improvements and measure change as well as help prepare for future ELM and private finance opportunities, and contribute to the development of the SDNPA's net zero with nature by 2040 action plan.



© SDNPA/Simon Verrall

Planned events are now taking place to discuss results, identify practical actions and demonstrate soil analysis methods so that farmers can undertake them themselves.

MAP OF PARTICIPATING FARMS



PURPOSE 2:

Connect

Develop strategies and support or lead strategic overarching partnerships and projects which deliver the second Purpose of National Parks: **To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.**

Progress against some of our key priorities as laid out in the Corporate Plan are summarised below:

WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO IN OUR CORPORATE PLAN	WHAT WE HAVE DONE
<p>Link into social prescribing and place based health networks to increase use of the National Park for health and well-being (H&WB) via social prescribing</p>	<p>This year we have been working with staff and service users to get the ‘Downs to the Sea’ engagement element of the project delivered via Chichester District Social Prescribers. We are delivering sessions to participants and x2 sessions to staff from this PCN. The staff include social prescribers, mental health support coordinators and health and wellbeing coaches from across the 4 surgeries in the Rural North of Chichester (Midhurst, Petworth, Loxwood and Pulborough). A second group is made up of Care coordinators also across the patch. Regular activity sessions, with transport provided, have been delivered for participants engaged through Enable Ability to supporting young people with disabilities to connect with nature, develop skills and confidence. Other work includes:</p> <p>Offering family days to support families to connect to nature at Seven Sisters Country Park, supporting the Early Help Team; Carers in Nature – Monthly walks have been well attended and ‘Word Art’ is being collected for a booklet due to be produced later this year</p>
<p>Be a representative and welcoming National Park for All, focusing on engaging currently under-served groups</p>	<p>Our hybrid engagement combining in-person events and digital engagement and content, has enabled us to reach more people than ever before. Two key hybrid festivals this year have been our ReNature Festival in July and our Dark Skies Festival in February. Both festivals focused not just on creating connection with the National Park, but with nature itself, and empowering people to explore, engage with and take action for nature both in the National Park and wherever they call home. More short videos and lives have seen our engagement increase. Together these festivals enabled us to reach more than 700,000 people; with over 5,000 attending in-person events and over 600 ReNature packs being sent out to community groups in and around the National Park and its urban fringe. Our hybrid engagement shows us that people care about nature and want to know what they can do to help. This is helping to shape our hybrid events and engagement for the 2023/24 when we will focus on empowering people to “Take Action for Nature and Climate”.</p>

A NATIONAL PARK FOR ALL

HIGH LEVEL TARGET

- Increase diversity of visitors to, and those engaging with, the South Downs National Park
- 'Your National Park' campaign reaches 20,000 people by 2025

INTRODUCTION

National Park for All means that we want everyone, residents, communities and visitors from all walks of life to experience, enjoy and care for the National Park. Some audiences continue to be underrepresented and so, to deliver our priorities, we target certain activities at those audiences: young people (aged 16- 24); people from black, Asian and ethnically diverse communities; people facing forms of health and access inequalities including disabled people; people living in urban areas, especially people facing socio-economic barriers to inclusion.

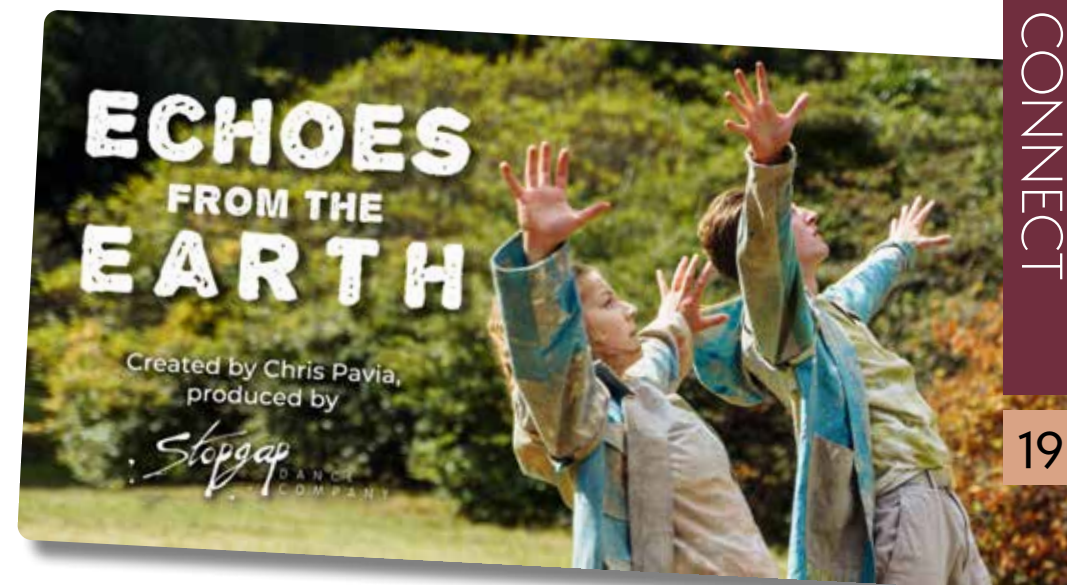
Projects and Programmes aimed at our target audience have included:

- **Arts and Creative activity / writing**
Echoes from the Earth

We supported the choreographer and Mencap ambassador Chris Pavia to develop an immerse dance production inspired by trees in the South Downs. With Stopgap Dance Company, he created Echoes from the Earth working with Special Educational Needs and Disability audiences in the outdoors. It toured Petworth Park, Gilbert White's House and Seven Sisters. The video from the production can be viewed here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTSgMLIXun8>

- **We See You Now**

A unique writer residency for Seven Sisters Country Park and the Heritage Coast. The project engaged 106 writers and 144 participants from intersectional and marginalised backgrounds. Fifty three new creative works



were produced, inspired by the South Downs and contemporary issues, including biodiversity loss and climate change, with one shared on BBC Radio 3.



- **Youth Action and Education work with schools**

- **South Downs Youth Action**

Engaging young people (16-25 year olds) is a priority for us. We have delivered 25 social and environmental action days, reaching 172 young people. We have also developed and supported Youth Ambassadors and youth voice, enabling young people to develop leadership skills and confidence in encouraging others to connect to the natural environment and learn to care for it.

- **Events and Engagement**

Our emerging hybrid engagement style has enabled us to reach different audiences. As part of the ReNature festival in 2022 over 600 packs were sent out to targeted community groups in and around the National Park and in the urban fringe. These were filled with tips, tools and fun goodies to help people get outside to explore and to help nature to #ReNature.

- **Volunteering**

- **Volunteer Ranger Service**

We support over 300 registered volunteers who deliver practical conservation tasks, biodiversity monitoring, event support, administrative support and project volunteering. This generates over £1 million in net benefits a year. As a result of volunteering 96% feel more connected to the wildlife, landscape and heritage of the National Park.

LOOKING AHEAD

We want to inspire individuals and communities to experience The South Downs National Park and take action to care for it. We want to work with individuals and communities to break down the barriers that stop them from feeling that the National Park is not for them, or which make it difficult for some to visit. We want to continue working to make the landscape more accessible and inclusive to people of all ages and abilities and from all backgrounds



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OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS: CONNECT

COMMUNITY WANDERINGS

This small but impactful project aimed to deliver inclusive, intergenerational community wanderings connecting various hidden gems in different parts of the South Downs National Park and bring them to life through storytelling and anecdotes of people and place. Four walks were held in locations in the east of the South Downs National Park, with a focus on new visitors inbound from London. Working with small groups of six participants per walk, the project lead, Saira Niazi, created a guided programme including public transport from London into the National Park and guided walk experiences using storytelling as a basis for people to connect with the landscape outside the usual narratives, and share their own stories of connection. Participants included a leader from a London based walking group (Wanderers of Colour), who have since taken an interest in including guided walks into the South Downs for first time visitors from London as part of their own delivery programme.

“It has inspired me to go back out to South Downs and the nearby areas and to bring friends and family with me. It also opened me up to the idea of going there to write and be creative...”



© SDNPA

TIMESCAPE

The Timescape project was delivered in partnership between the South Downs National Park Authority – who funded the £25,420 project – and Artscape, a small independent charity. It sought to engage isolated individuals in the more deprived areas on the fringes of the National Park, with their local landscape and heritage, through art. The aim was to create sustainable interventions

which contribute to a reduction in loneliness and improve participant’s health and wellbeing. Participants were targeted from social prescribing pathways in Portsmouth, Chichester, Waterlooville and Havant, in some of the more deprived areas on the fringes of the National Park.

The project was delivered at museums in the National Park aiming to bring new audiences into the Weald and Downland Museum, Butser Ancient Farm and the surrounding landscapes, and to increase the confidence of these organisations in delivering social prescribing and wellbeing programmes. In addition the project aimed to Support participants to learn new artistic skills and traditional crafts; upskill staff and volunteers to work with new audiences; create a legacy for individuals to continue their journey through support and signposting.

The project successfully engaged 27 people through a variety of recruitment methods. As the majority (85%) had a long term mental/physical health problem or disability, the project team enabled access to the host venues and project sessions by providing transport for vulnerable participants. The project would not have been possible without this support.

Participant feedback demonstrated overwhelmingly positive experiences of spending time in nature with 57% of participants spending more time outside as a result of the project. Participants learned new traditional craft skills including pottery, stone carving, spinning wool and weaving amongst others culminating in an exhibition of their work at Petersfield Museum. Inspired, almost all participants planned to continue practising their new creative skills outside of the project.

Several participants have gone on to volunteer at the host venues and join artistic and cultural organisations demonstrating improved confidence and a lasting interest in project themes. The video (**Timescape Chat**) that was made as part of the project beautifully captures how participants felt about their experience of the project.

PURPOSE 3:

Thrive

Develop strategies and support or lead strategic overarching partnerships and projects which deliver the Duty of National Parks: to build sustainable communities which are engaged and shaping their environment and supporting sustainable businesses and tourism.

Progress against some of our key priorities as laid out in the Corporate Plan is summarised below update:

WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO IN OUR CORPORATE PLAN	WHAT WE HAVE DONE
<p>Facilitate and support the endorsement, actions and key priorities through the process of Whole Estate Plans (WEPs)</p>	<p>There are eight endorsed WEPs across the SDNP up from six at the start of the financial year. In Q4, Brighton and Hove CC WEP or City Downland Plan was the latest WEP to be endorsed by P&R Committee on 23rd February 2023. The pipeline now consists of four estates with scheduled Member Site Visits and one estate that is at Stage 4 of their WEP Journey. The four estates with scheduled Member visits are: Westerland Stud Estate (27 April 2023), Glynde Estate (10 Oct 2023), Lancing College (27 Feb 2024), and Plumpton College (21 May 2024). Firle Estate is the estate that is currently progressing into Stage 4.</p>
<p>Deliver the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme in the National Park</p>	<p>Q4 2022/23 saw the end of year two of the FiPL Programme. In total, 26 projects were approved by the Local Assessment Panel (LAP) totalling £383,822.24, including £29,832.32 from the National Pot. Applications covered all four of the FiPL objectives (nature, climate, people and place) including wetland management, fencing, traditional barn restoration, interpretation, pond creation and items to facilitate regenerative farming.</p>
<p>Administer the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and S106 – key income streams for delivery</p>	<p>CIL 2022/23 spend: £411,665 on nine projects; 2022/23 collected: £3,015,308 Projects include improving accessibility at Seven Sisters Country Park, new public car park in Ditchling, new play and outdoor facilities at Droxford Junior School, West Ashling and Funtington District Hall refurbishment, improved access at Iping Common and delivering parts of Phase 2 of Centurion Way.</p> <p>S106 2022/23 spend: £198,138 on four projects; 2022/23 collected: £20,068 Funded projects include Centurion Way, travel plan, nitrate monitoring and Solent Recreation Mitigation.</p>

RURAL ECONOMY

The last year has been a busy period for SDNPA. Since launching the 'Our South Downs' (OSD) in May 2022, our business network has grown to 152 members by the end of 2022/23.

The launch of new OSD social media channels has helped to boost reach as well as champion some of our OSD members. Additionally, the administration of business-facing schemes such as *Cyclists & Walkers Welcome* & *Dark Skies Welcome* has moved to the Our South Downs team, enabling more joined up communications.

We have also introduced bespoke Corporate income generation schemes :

- **South Downs Guardian:** Businesses can donate £1000 to become an official Guardian of the South Downs for a year. In doing so, they can gain access to our unique South Downs Guardian 'Mark' and become listed on the South Downs Trust Website.
- **South Downs Protector:** This scheme invites corporate partners to support the South Downs National Park for a year with a £10,000 contribution helping to fund our ReNaturing target of 13,000 hectares recovered for nature by 2030. For businesses, it's a way of demonstrating ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) commitments as well as forming closer ties with the South Downs National Park. Scheme benefits for businesses include a year's subscription to the Green South Downs Sustainability Certification, ranger talks, volunteer days and free venue hire.

This year, the Green South Downs Sustainability Certification scheme was successfully piloted with 19 businesses. The scheme, now open to all Our South Downs members, is a bespoke sustainability award programme created by the South Downs National Park Authority in partnership with Green Tourism for businesses based and/or working in the South Downs National Park. It helps businesses working in the visitor economy, food and drink or land-based sectors on

their sustainability journey and get recognition for the work they are doing through Bronze, Silver, or Gold Awards according to performance against the criteria.

"We are completely thrilled and chuffed to bits with our Silver award and will proudly print and display in the taproom and brewery, on our website and our social media... spreading the word and promoting awareness far and wide."

Lesley Foulkes, Langham Brewery



SUCCESSSES

- Quarterly OSD Newsletter moved to monthly communications since Sept 2022
- Two South Downs Protectors signed up – committing £20,000 in funds to the South Downs National Park Trust
- Six **'Meet the Business'** Videos produced, showcasing member businesses and their journey towards sustainability
- 'Our South Downs' Instagram, from 0 to 100+ followers in one month
- Four Gold, nine Silver and six Bronze Green South Downs Sustainability Certified businesses



LOOKING AHEAD

We are looking forward to continuing our established and developing relationships with our partners and local stakeholders. **Lets Do Business Group** has been instrumental in helping promote Our South Downs to its extensive network. Similarly, our partnership with **Green Tourism** greatly contributed to the success of the Green South Downs pilot.

For this coming year, we are looking to:

- focus on promoting sustainability in business, shortening and strengthening rural supply chains and generating business income for the South Downs Trust;
- at least double the Our South Downs member numbers in the next financial year to 300+ and grow our Instagram to 1000 Followers;
- launch light Destination Management signposting, linking the public to Our South Downs accommodation providers to generate income through Visitor Giving, and to promote sustainability through championing Green South Downs accommodation providers;
- strengthen Rural Supply chains: Launch a simple business directory – digitally searchable and PDF to help Our South Downs businesses transact with one another (B2B) and later, to consider a B2C directory;
- increase year on year Corporate Income through the South Downs Protector and Guardians schemes;

launch Visitor Giving Lite; simple QR code donation points to be added to rooms and lobbies for accommodation providers.

PLACE MAKING

The SDNPA's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) continued its success raising a total of £3.015m in the financial year, the most raised since CIL started in 2017.

This will enable the SDNPA to spend more on the implementation of projects than in any other year. In the 2022/23 financial year £552k was given directly to Parish and Town Councils for them to spend on projects in their communities. Additionally, within the year a significant number of projects funded wholly or partly by SDNPA's CIL funding were completed benefitting both people and nature within the National Park and case studies can be viewed [here](#). SDNPA are the only National Park to administer CIL.

£106 legal agreements have been largely replaced by CIL but the Authority released £862,318.94 in funding to 19 projects in the financial year.

In terms of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) work, officers were heavily involved in three NSIP projects that will have impacts on the National Park:

- The M3 Junction 9 scheme (the Development Consent Order (DCO) application has been submitted and is now with the Examining Authority for a six month examination)
- Rampion 2 windfarm (the DCO application is expected to be made in Summer)
- The A27 at Arundel (this scheme has since been deferred to RIS 3, covering 2025 – 2030).

CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

As ever, our Conservation, Design and Landscape Officers were kept busy by a high planning workload due to SDNPA being one of the biggest planning authorities in the country, determining more planning applications than most

London Boroughs. Multiple gains from development have been derived throughout the year working with planning officers and we have achieved high compliance with our Sustainable Construction Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) helping to mitigate the impacts of new development on Climate Change. The Authority also recorded its 'best ever' performance at appeal with 77% of appeals in the financial year being dismissed.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Government have stated that they want to replace CIL with a new Infrastructure Levy and SDNPA will be monitoring what any future changes may mean for the Authority. Government is suggesting Parish Priority Statements as alternatives to Neighbourhood Plans and the Authority is expecting a number of such Statements to be completed within the National Park.



Completed Chilcomb route on SDW now bypassing busy A31 roundabout © SDNPA



Further riverbank repairs for watersport access at SSCP © Buzz Active



Leighside pond renovation at Lewes Railway Land © Helen Meade

CASE STUDY: PETERSFIELD WALKING FESTIVAL – SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Petersfield Walking Festival was set up as a constituted community organisation with the aim of promoting the area and its surroundings, in consideration of the neighbourhood plan which identifies the town as a gateway to the South Downs. This year's festival took place between the 20th and 27th August 2022 and included a programme of over 40 walks catering for a range of interests and abilities.

With an initial cash budget of £3,000 to cover the event website, fees and equipment associated with the events such as high-vis jackets and first aid kits, the project drew in financial support from a range of partners. These included Petersfield Town Council, Hampshire County Council and the Petersfield Society.

We provided a small grant of £435 towards the final project costs from the South Downs National Park's Sustainable Communities Fund (SCF). A considerable amount of volunteer time was committed by festival organisers estimated at over £7,400 in non-cash contributions.

The SCF funding contribution was put towards an event website with integrated booking system, associated insurance and fees in order to hold walks free of charge.

The aims of the festival were to:

- Encourage people to get outside for exercise or well-being;
- Attract visitors from further afield, boosting the Town's visitor economy;
- Provide opportunities to promote local businesses, organisations and walking groups;
- Provide an opportunity for local people to better appreciate the Town's location within the National Park and get to know the area better.

The programme covered an extensive range of events from Sunday strolls and Nordic pole-walking to 'Walking with Wheels' with Disabled Ramblers UK. The South Downs National Park Authority also took part leading three walks, including a 'heathlands safari'. Carefully planned routes promoted pubs and vineyards, local attractions and

events, charities, community shops/cafes, conservation programmes, local transport networks and local walking groups.

The festival took advantage of the August bank holiday weekend, being inclusive of working people and young families. Where possible, there were circular and linear walks positioned near train stations to encourage sustainable transport. The impact of parking was reduced by asking local attractions and businesses to allow for parking.

A total of **46 walks** were held over the one week period, well in excess the originally planned programme. There were **688 bookings** made through the website, although a portion did not show and there were challenges affecting attendance, such as a train strike.

The walks attracted people from major cities such as London, Birmingham and Brighton (even a tourist from Australia!) as well as those from the local area. It was promoted via online and print media and reported in the local press.

Considerable volunteer and financial support resulted in all of the walks being held for free. This included the walk run by Disabled Ramblers UK who are obliged to charge fees to cover the cost of providing mechanical repair assistance for mobility equipment.

The next festival is planned for 2023 and will instead be spread across the year, taking in the beauty of different seasons.



© Petersfield Walking Festival

OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS: THRIVE

APPROVAL FOR NEW AFFORDABLE HOMES

Twenty-five new affordable homes have been approved as part of the redevelopment of a brownfield site in Bepton Road, Midhurst. The SDNPA's Planning Committee voted to give the green light to plans submitted by Metis Homes for 69 homes, the approved plans include 12 affordable rented flats and 13 shared ownership houses.

A total of £100,000 is set to be invested by the developer to deliver access and path improvements at nearby Midhurst Common, together with a £12,660 contribution to deliver ecological compensation measures on the Common.

The provision of a public footpath and cycle route through the site is among the benefits of the development. This will safeguard a potential future non-motorised travel route along the former Petersfield to Pulborough railway line. Historically part of the site was the Midhurst Brickworks, famed for producing the 'Midhurst White'. The brickworks closed in 1985 and some of the original structures remain in situ.

The approved development includes a number of features tailored to helping the environment, including 10% green roofs and provision of electric vehicle charging points for all properties. The scheme will achieve an approximate site average of 17% reduction in regulated carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions through a fabric first approach and with the inclusion of PV panels it will reduce to a site average of 40.5%.

FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme is a part of Defra's Agricultural Transition Plan offering funding to farmers and land managers in AONBs, National Parks and the Broads.

Within the South Downs National Park, FiPL is delivered by the Authority's Farming Team. A Local Assessment Panel, comprising predominately of farmers, meet to decide on which projects should be supported. Decisions are based on national scoring criteria set by Defra; the programme will fund projects that:

- support nature recovery
- mitigate the impacts of climate change
- provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and its cultural heritage
- protect or improve the quality and character of the landscape or place

Q4 saw the end of year two of the FiPL Programme which runs until March 2025. In total, 26 projects were approved by the Local Assessment Panel (LAP) totalling £383,822.24

Some of the projects funded include:

LYCHPOLE FARM, SOMPTING – AWARDED £6,370

This project involves the creation of a farm brand, website and social media following to inform the public about the farm's general farming activities and with particular regard to its pumpkin diversification event to drive forward farm diversification and public engagement. It comprises four outputs:

- Branding for the farm and pumpkin business to increase visibility and presence.
- A website for the farm and pumpkin business, including a blog, to provide information and updates.
- Promotional materials for the pumpkin patch (leaflets, signage etc).
- A social media presence, linked to the website, to provide another route to share information and updates.



© Guy Edwardes

THE BIGNOR ROMAN VILLA CHARITABLE TRUST – AWARDED £59,823.32

This project involves roofing repairs to and re-thatching of historic buildings at Bignor Roman Villa to help protect and conserve both the Roman remains/ mosaics and the buildings themselves (which are rare examples of surviving Georgian thatched agricultural buildings within the landscape of the South Downs National Park). It comprises two objectives/outputs:

- The replacement of the flat roof over north corridor museum building conserving roman mosaics.
- The re-thatching of surviving Georgian agricultural buildings conserving roman mosaics.



© SDNPA

ON THE GROUND AND GRASSROOTS PROJECTS

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 2022/23:

WEST BURTON STREAM

A small groundwater-fed chalk stream that rises from the northern scarp of the Downs, near Bignor, and flows west until it joins the Arun just north of Bury. Where the stream reaches the hamlet of West Burton in West Sussex, it flows through a small parcel of common land known as Pill Common. Owned by Bury Parish Council, this site contains both a community orchard and a small pond, known locally as the "Pill Pond".

The Parish Council periodically dredges the pond to remove sediment that builds up behind an impounding structure – an earthen dam, wooden step boarding, and a concrete fish-pass. However, water was found to be leaking in multiple places making the fish pass obsolete and acting as a wildlife trap for amphibians, mammals and birds. Proposals were put together to remove the dam and restore the stream connecting the upper and lower reaches for the first time in 100 years. Works were carried out throughout 2022.

This project has made a significant contribution to nature recovery, enhancing ecological connectivity for a range of species, and



© SDNPA

providing potential spawning habitat for a native species – the Brown Trout – that is increasingly threatened by climate change and habitat.

The £11,000 project, funded by SDNPA, was designed in partnership with the Wild Trout Trust.

MICRO-VOLUNTEERING WITH iNATURALIST

South Downs youth volunteers have been leading the way with the rollout of iNaturalist in the National Park by adding important sightings to the **NPUK LookWild** project. One-off volunteer days took place during 2022 to give people aged 16-25 the opportunity to try volunteering and meet professional rangers for a day. It's a great way to learn about potential career paths and ask experts questions about their experience. Participants are also learning about community science initiatives and improving their general knowledge of wildlife ecology. Because iNaturalist is an app on people's personal phones, it's something they can take home, share with friends and family, and use to build up a portfolio of observations.



One of the most popular activities has been using iNaturalist to survey woodland and meadow habitats at unlikely locations, in this case, museums. In April, as part of the Brighton & Eastern Downs City Nature Challenge, young people visited Amberley Museum. The task was to observe wildflowers in a steep section of ancient woodland that long pre-dates the chalk quarrying heritage of the museum

grounds. 180 observations were made of 82 species of plant, animal and fungus.

In May, another Youth Action day took place in West Sussex at the Weald and Downland Living Museum. The young people helped to survey a large area of meadow that is currently managed by the Museum's volunteers with traditional scything and raking techniques. 210 observations were made recording 86 species. The day gave young people a taste of what ecological monitoring is like, as well as experiencing an open air museum rich in fascinating heritage. The observations will help inform the Museum's understanding of how heritage land management shapes the ecological elements of the landscape.

EXPLORING TRULEIGH HILL

Asphaleia are a Worthing based charity who work with unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugee children. Their mission is 'to impact as many lives of children and young people who have experienced disadvantage'.

In autumn 2022, a group of 16 – 17 year olds from Asphaleia visited Truleigh Hill, nr Shoreham, to experience the countryside and spend time in nature with SDNPA staff.

All the young people come from a diverse range of countries including Sudan, Afghanistan, Vietnam and Turkey and are currently living with foster carers in West Sussex.

The young people arrived with Sussex Community Transport and spent the morning walking, taking the opportunity to appreciate the spectacular views enhanced by the



© SDNPA

changing season, and see some of the National Park. For all, it was their first time being out in the English countryside.

All participants are studying English and maths, personal and social skills development, careers education and awareness of UK culture.

RENATURE CREDITS

An innovative scheme to restore biodiversity and deliver nature-based climate action was launched by the South Downs National Park Authority this year.

"ReNature Credits" will bring together developers and landowners to unlock private finance streams that deliver multiple benefits for nature recovery, including restoring lost habitats, woodland creation and wildflower meadows. It comes as the compliance and offsetting market widens significantly this year with the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain from November for most types of development.

Developers will be able to acquire ReNature Credits through the National Park Authority's brokerage service for phosphates, nitrates, and Biodiversity Net Gain. Carbon offsetting may also be introduced at a later date.

The National Park Authority is uniquely placed as a Local Planning Authority with thousands of hectares of land already identified for biodiversity restoration as part of its existing ReNature initiative.

Acting as a sustainability-focused broker, the Authority will work with developers and landowners to maximise benefits for nature and local communities within the National Park. The brokerage service is initially launching with two strategic sites: Iford Estate and Warnford Park Estate.



RENATURING OF CISSBURY FIELDS

Work is well underway to “renature” a popular site and ensure it becomes a thriving environment for wildlife and visitors alike. Cissbury Fields, located at the foot of Cissbury Ring, were previously farmed by a tenant, but were taken back under the control of the Worthing Borough Council in 2021 as part of its pledge to support biodiversity and help tackle climate change.



© SDNPA

The council has been working closely with the SDNPA Central Ranger team as well as the National Trust, nature groups, residents and dog walkers to help create a new future for the 40-hectare fields that prioritises biodiversity. The aim is to turn the field into a mosaic of wildlife-rich habitats, including chalk grassland, hedge and scrub.

One of the bigger changes to the management of the site will be the re-introduction of livestock, hopefully next year. The livestock will act as conservation grazers, increasing the diversity of flowers and plants and encouraging more pollinators to visit the site.

Community involvement is also at the forefront of the plans, as well as creating dedicated walking paths, entry points and an on-site car park.

SUSSEX HERITAGE AWARDS

A garden restoration project, regenerated farm buildings and a winery with visitor attractions were announced as the winners of the South Downs Award at the 2022 Sussex Heritage Trust Awards.

Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the National Park Authority, presented the South Downs Award at a glittering ceremony at Pangdean Old Barn.

The prestigious accolade is sponsored by the Authority and aims to promote outstanding design in a nationally-designated landscape.



One Garden Brighton in Stanmer Park was announced as the overall winner of the South Downs Award. The new facility is a partnership between Brighton and Hove City Council and Plumpton College to restore Stanmer Park. An amazing walled garden and community space has been created, with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, in 20 hectares of the park with the aim to also deliver training, education and outreach opportunities. The South Downs National Park judging team said of the project: “A much-needed, accessible space for everyone, which connects the South Downs National Park with Brighton and Hove.”

Two highly commended projects were also announced: Southview Farm in Pulborough (submitted by Nicholls Countryside Construction), a new family home created from a series of redundant farm buildings, collectively known as ‘Bone Barn’ arranged around a courtyard and 17th century barn

NEW SUSSEX SECTION OF THE ENGLAND COAST PATH

The first complete section in Sussex opened in summer 2022, giving walkers new opportunities to connect with nature and all the wellbeing benefits of a coastal ramble with all of that fresh sea air.

The 33-mile (53km) route goes from Shoreham-by-Sea to Eastbourne and takes in the iconic chalk cliffs of the National Park. This new stretch of trail is also a vital



link in the South East section of the England Coast Path. Once complete, the whole of the South East Coast Path will run from Shoreham-by-Sea to the London Borough of Bexley.

Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the National Park Authority, said: "This is wonderful news and a fantastic opportunity for walkers to get out and explore.

"The path goes over Seaford head, crosses the Cuckmere at Exceat Bridge and then follows the South Downs Way through Seven Sisters, providing another easy-to-follow walking route into the Country Park.

"This route will form a key part of the 2,700-mile-long England Coast Path, which will become the longest walking route in the world."

There is a host of wildlife along the route including migratory and nesting birds such as lesser whitethroat and fulmars, wildflowers including birds' foot trefoil and thrift, and plenty of butterflies and insects.

For more information visit the England Coastal Path information page [here](#).



Oystercatchers © Tim Squire



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 2022-23 the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) received a grant totalling around **£10.9 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 2022-23 the SDNPA received income of just over **£4.3 million** through planning activities (including Community Infrastructure Levy).

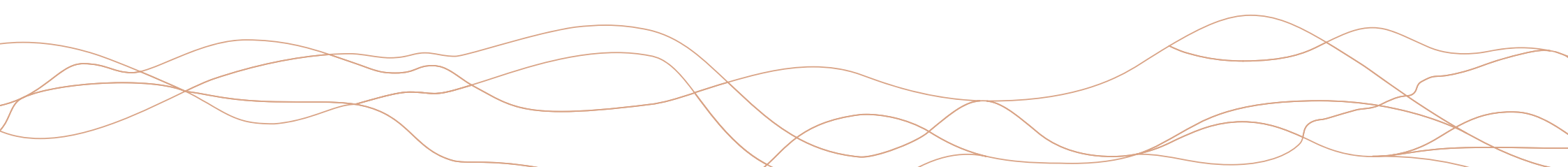
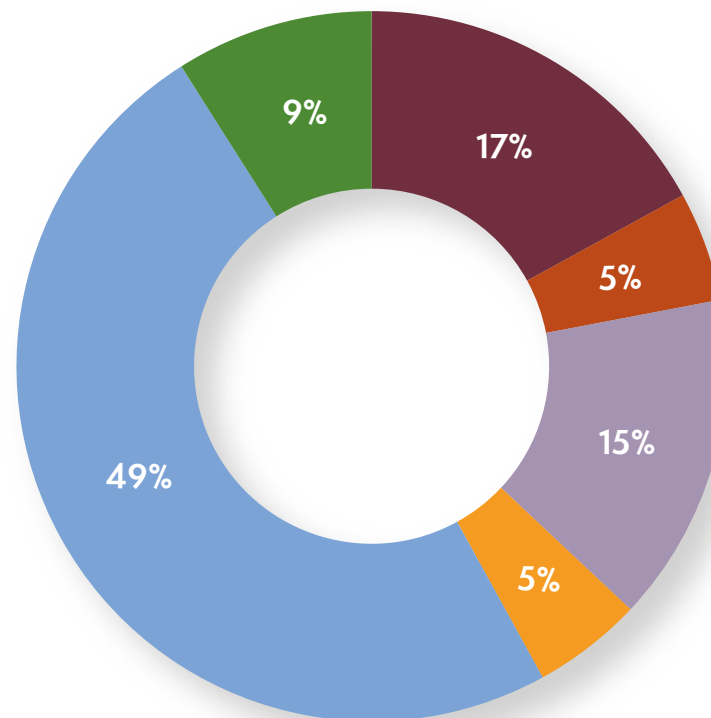
The SDNPA was also successful in attracting significant funding for projects to deliver the Partnership Management Plan. During 2021-22 the SDNPA received **£3.1 million** of income through specific grants and contributions in addition to funds secured by other partners to deliver work in the National Park.

In total the income received by the SDNPA in 2022-23 was **£17.6 million**.



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

At the creation of the National Park Authority we set an ambitious vision for the South Downs National Park. By 2050:

- 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.

This document demonstrates that we are well on track to achieve our vision for the National Park. 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 2 Action Plan – 2021–22)**
- **Corporate Plan 2020–2025 (Year 3 Action Plan – 2022–23)**



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For your guide to everything there is to
see and do in the National Park visit
southdowns.gov.uk/discovery-map

