

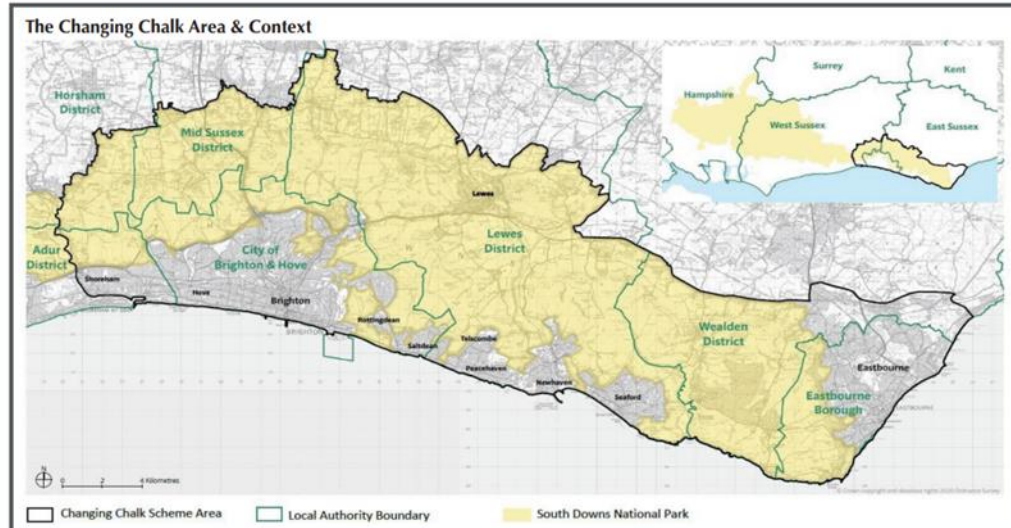
Report to **South Downs Policy & Resources Committee**
 Date **23 November 2023**
 By **Countryside and Policy Manager (Eastern Downs)**
 Title of Report **Changing Chalk – project update**

Note

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to note the Changing Chalk Project update

I. Introduction

I.1 This report is an update to Members on the progress of the Changing Chalk Project.



I.2 Changing Chalk is a landscape scale, multi-partner, multi-initiative project lead 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 total match funding by £1,888,202.

I.3 The project funding was confirmed Autumn 2022, the project went live spring 2022 and is now in its second year of delivery. There is a strong delivery partnership of ten partners including the National Trust, Brighton & Hove City Council, Brighton and Hove Food Partnership, The Living Coast Biosphere, Natural England, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Lewes Railway Land, Buglife, Lewes District Council and the South Downs National Park Authority.



2. Policy Context

- 2.1 Changing Chalk is an exemplar project delivering across multiple Partnership Management Plan Outcomes through multiple partners. It directly delivers across the Corporate Plan priorities of Nature Recovery and National Park for All. The project area covers 458 sq km of the Eastern Downs plus the coastal urban conurbations of Eastbourne, Brighton & Hove and Shoreham. Funded partner projects such as Changing Chalk are also one of the many mechanisms that contribute towards the SDNP ReNature and Core Nature targets. It is also supporting delivery against the vision and actions of the Eastbourne Downland Whole Estate Plan (WEP) and the Brighton City Downland Plan (WEP)
- 2.2 The aim of the project is to restore lost habitats, bring histories to life and provide new experiences in the outdoors. Over four years 18 projects will be delivered by the ten partners and will create multiple connections across the urban and rural areas of the South Downs, and will reconnect the fragmented areas of the remaining chalk grassland. Changing Chalk follows on from previous chalk grassland initiatives such as the South Downs Way Ahead Project which was chosen to be one of Defra's Nature Improvement Areas (NIA) in 2012-2015.

3. Project delivery is under three themes:

- 3.1 Restoring chalkland biodiversity: Over 800ha of land will be newly managed to benefit nature, including 90ha of golf course returned to species rich downland and 40 sites returned to active grazing. Five historic dew ponds will be restored, and the long-term future of the iconic Wart-Biter Bushcricket will be secured. The project is also researching new, more sustainable methods of managing fragile chalk grassland. The South Downs National Park Authority is the lead partner for the grazing and dew ponds initiatives. The NLHF grant is £98,700 for the Grazing Project with a SDNPA match of £90,000, whilst the Dew Pond Project NLHF grant is £52,700 with SDNPA match of £25,050 for the whole delivery phase (up to 2025).
- 3.2 Connecting downs and towns: "A Find your Future" programme will support young people gain vital skills, whilst 2,250 primary school pupils will have the chance to experience Farm School. More than 40 Dog Ambassadors will raise awareness of why we need grazing on the Downs and help dog owners to help us in our mission. There are also initiatives to help

communities access green space and the Downs will come to the towns with new chalk grassland planting on 12 city sites.

- 3.3 Hearts and histories of the Downs: The residents of Eastbourne have been invited to join a community excavation project to uncover their local archaeological history. Annual celebrations of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month will explore the cultural links of this community to the Downs, whilst seasonal programmes, micro bursaries and writing workshops will engage people of colour and the wider public to respond creatively to their experience and connections with the South Downs.

4. Issues for consideration

- 4.1 Year 1 delivery highlights (April 2022 to March 2023):

- 256 hectares chalk grassland under improved management / being restored.
- 230 engagement activities delivered across partnership.
- 7,340 people engaged (through activities or volunteering)

- 4.2 Restoring Chalkland Biodiversity - highlights:

- Habitat: 60ha chalk downland now grazed at Wilding Waterhall (BHCC) and 142ha under improved grazing management through the Grazing Project (SDNPA). 50ha arable reversion to wildflower grassland at Gayles Farm (NT).
- Research and surveys: seed trials established at 2 vineyards (Buglife), scrub clearance research trials on 2 National Nature Reserves (NE and RBG Kew), 8 Local Wildlife Sites surveyed (SxBRC).
- Training & engagement: Volunteers trained in pollinator identification and wart-biter surveying (Buglife), 733 people engaged at Wilding Waterhall (BHCC) and 128 people in Landscapes for Wild Pollinators project (Buglife).

- 4.3 Connecting Downs and Towns - highlights:

- Find Your Future youth project: 8-week Countryside Skills programme for young people not in employment, education or training (National Trust (NT))
- Growing New Roots: 2 x 8-week Ecotherapy programmes delivered (Brighton & Hove Food Partnership)
- Over 100 volunteers engaged in chalk grassland conservation, plus a range of engagement activities at sites across the Downs (NT and Railway Land Wildlife Trust)
- New 'Meatshare' scheme connecting communities to their local farms and food production (now 'Sussex Grazed')

- 4.4 4.4 Hearts and Histories of the Downs - highlights:

- Downs from Above – 190km² aerial investigation mapping of the South Downs (NT)
- 25 Scheduled Ancient Monuments condition assessed (NT)
- Over 2000 people engaged through Big Dig excavation at Butt's Brow (Heritage Eastbourne)
- 8 creative writing workshops delivered by Writing Our Legacy
- Cultural audit underway exploring Gypsy, Roma and Traveller historical and cultural connections to the South Downs (NT).

- 4.5 The project has also established a Community Grants Scheme. To date, a total of £21,828 has been awarded to 6 local community organisations/groups. The most recent round closed for applications in early November 2023. The grants are up to £5,000 for community projects and up to £10,000 for priority chalk grassland projects. The scheme will open again for future application rounds.

4.6 There is also a wide range of volunteering opportunities across the partnership's 18 initiatives, covering habitat and conservation, monument mentoring, community participation, office volunteering and more. In Year 1 of the project, volunteers contributed over 5,000 hours, equating to £65,470 in-kind.

5. Next steps

5.1 Now in Year 2 of delivery the Changing Chalk Project continues to implement the range of action under the agreed programme. Active collaboration will continue through the partnership and project oversight through the Project Board and National Trust Changing Chalk Project Team.

5.2 As an exemplar of landscape-scale and partnership collaboration of delivering the Partnership Management Plan the outcomes of the 18 initiatives will contribute directly to delivery of the South Downs National Park Corporate Plan targets.

5.3 Looking ahead the legacy of Changing Chalk is already starting to be explored so the investment from this initiative can be sustained longer term. This has already involved learning from the Heathland Reunited Project which was a similar landscape-scale, multi-partner National Lottery Heritage Fund supported project led by SDNPA. Learning from Changing Chalk is also feeding into the much larger Big Chalk Project which is a collaboration of all the calcareous protected landscapes in southern England.

6. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No. But further project updates and a project closedown report will form part of regular project reporting.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	The South Downs National Park Authority is a project partner and has a financial commitment and project agreement in place until 2026. Officer time includes leading the Grazing Project and Dew Pond Project. Some support for communications is provided through the Communications Team. The Authority also has representation on the Project Board.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	This project is an exemplar of partnership working supporting our values and delivering desired outcomes. Funded projects represent one mechanism by which nature recovery can be delivered. The project is also contributing towards the National Park for All target.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	PMP outcomes: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10 Corporate Plan Targets: Nature Recovery, Climate Action and National Park for All
Links to other projects or partner organisations	Yes – the project links to all the ten project partners and other areas of work they are involved with or lead on.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	The Changing Chalk project supports climate action with nature within the South Downs National Park. Creating a more resilient landscape supports objectives for mitigation and adaptation.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the	Yes – the project has multiple benefits across the three themes (see above), including volunteering opportunities and ways of

Implication	Yes*/No
proposal?	connecting individuals and communities to the landscape.
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Yes – the project has multiple benefits across the three themes (see above), including volunteering opportunities and ways of connecting individuals and communities to the landscape.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	None. The project seeks to promote equality, diversity and inclusivity.
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	None
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	None. Project delivery will be in accordance with SDNPA Health & Safety policies.
Are there any Data Protection implications?	None

7. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
SDNPA match funding	minimal	Affect draw down of NHLF funding	SDNPA contribution secured through budget planning process

INSERT NAME OF THE REPORT AUTHOR

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Appendices none

SDNPA Consultees Director of Countryside Policy and Management

External Consultees Sam Page, Project Manager Changing Chalk, National Trust

Background Documents Changing Chalk website: [Changing Chalk project | Sussex | National Trust](#)

South Downs Way Ahead Project - Nature Improvement Area:
[Three years of Nature Improvement Areas – South Downs National Park Authority](#)

