

Report to **Policy & Resources Committee**
Date **27 June 2024**
By **Performance and Projects Lead**
Title of Report **Q4 Corporate Performance and Projects report 2023/24**
Decision

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

I. Receive and consider the Q4 Corporate Performance and Projects Report 2023/24.

I. Introduction

- I.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Policy & Resources Committee on the Authority's corporate performance during Quarter 3 (Q3) and Quarter 4 (Q4) of 2023/24: 01 October to 31 March 2024, as well as give an annual overview of performance.
- I.2 The Policy and Resources Committee has terms of reference which include "To monitor and identify improvements arising from the outcomes and evaluation of projects identified by the Committee, audits, survey and other feedback and make recommendations as appropriate" and "To monitor and review the performance, including financial performance, of the Authority in the context of its business delivery, and the management and maintenance of the Authority's assets in accordance with the Authority's agreed budget, Corporate Plan and other approved plans, and make recommendations for changes as appropriate".
- I.3 The committee also has "... oversight of bids for grant funding including to receive updates on the submission of bids for grant funding and the application of grants funds received".
- I.4 The committee is recommended to receive and consider the content of the performance report and make any recommendations arising from its consideration of the report. Any such recommendations would be subject to a vote at the committee meeting.
- I.5 We report against PMP outcomes via the three High Level Target themed areas and five Corporate Plan priority areas, which includes **Grant Funding**. Dashboards demonstrating annual project and performance for 2024 are included as appendices and explained in this report. Key project information is also included in this report at section 4.
- I.6 The report also provides Members with a progress update for the actions from the Annual Governance Statement and the Human Resources and Health and Safety report (see sections 6 and 7).
- I.7 The new Learning and Improvement report, the annual Compliments, Comments & Complaints report and the 2023/24 Annual Review are included as appendices to this report.
- I.8 The Performance and Projects team developed a new system for tracking the performance of our projects and Corporate Plan KPIs in 2023/2024. Following an extensive testing phase over the summer, the new system, called "Performance Tracker", was rolled out in Q3. Key

staff were trained on the new system at the end of Q3. The Performance Tracker will streamline the project approval process and simplify the way we collect project and performance data. A review of the new system will take place over the summer of 2024 to identify teething issues and plan essential improvements.

2. Progress against High level targets

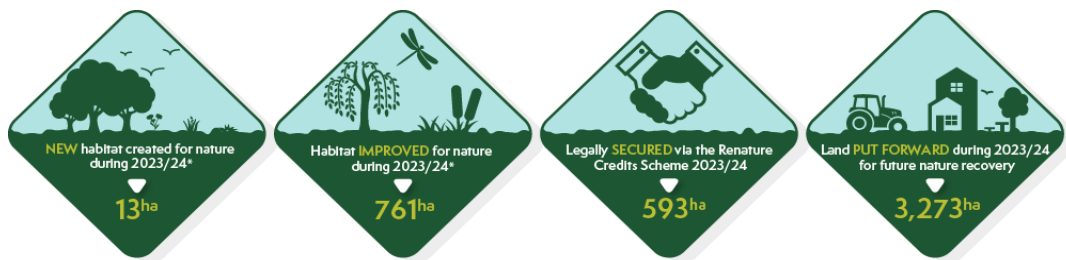
2.1 Appendix I summarises 2023/24 contributions towards the High-Level Targets and Corporate Plan KPIs.

Nature Recovery

2.2 As an Authority we continue to use **multiple mechanisms** to work with landowners, managers and partners to deliver action for ReNature and core nature.

2.3 **HLT#1: To secure an additional 13,000ha, or 33% of land managed for nature by 2030 from a baseline of 25%.**

Figure 1



*From previously committed land

2.4 Progress against HLT1 has been monitored through key performance indicators outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Progress against HLT1: To secure an additional 13,000ha, or 33% of land managed for nature by 2030 from a baseline of 25%

KPI	KPI Target (10-year target to 2030)	KPI contribution Q1/Q2	KPI contribution Q3/Q4	Cumulative progress to date (2022 start)
H1.1 Total hectares of habitat created for nature	13,000ha	7ha	6ha	417 ha
H1.2 Total hectares habitat improved for nature		217ha	544ha	5,073 ha
H1.3 Total hectares legally secured via the ReNature credits scheme		587ha	6ha	592 ha
TOTAL	13,000ha	811ha	556ha	6,082ha
H1.4 Total hectares land put forward for future nature recovery	N/A	3,073ha	200ha	3,273ha
H1.5 Total ha of habitat creation & improvement funded by The South Downs National Park Trust	2,000ha	Reported annually in Q4	Delay in reporting, due Q2 2024/25	

- 2.4.1 At the end of Q4, a total of 6,082 additional hectares of land have been secured or managed for nature since 2022. This is 47% of the 13,000 hectares target to be achieved by 2030. Please note that all hectares are estimated and these calculations are based on best available data.
- 2.4.2 The dashboard at Appendix 2 shows that nature recovery action was delivered primarily through Area Team work and Nature Based Solutions activities. 2022-23 contributed a greater number of hectares for nature recovery as FiPL funding was directed primarily towards projects benefiting nature whereas this year's FiPL theme has been people-focussed projects.
- 2.4.3 Highlights of progress towards HLT1 in Q3/Q4 include:
- H1.1: The spreading of wildflower seed on Liss Recreation Ground and at Newton Valance contributed 0.81ha habitat creation. Additionally, the Re-Nature grant project Lórien Rewilding at Steyning achieved 4.76ha of new nature through the creation of wildlife ponds.
 - This year, 5.27ha of habitat creation and 29.6ha of habitat improvement has been achieved through the Re-Nature grant scheme. Other grant projects have included water-vole habitat creation at Brook Farm near Midhurst, and the creation of a wildflower meadow for the Churchfield Meadow Biodiversity Project, near Winchester, run by Twyford Valley Conservation CIC.
 - H1.2: The Area teams have been focussed primarily on Chalk Grassland Management using methods including cut and collect, scrub removal and conservation grazing to improve the condition of the grassland. This includes 215ha of grassland recovery at Millpond Bottom by the Central team, and 38ha by the Eastern Area Team opening up areas for grazing livestock and scrape creation to benefit the Grayling butterfly.
 - 29.6ha have been improved through ReNature Grant work including 14.9ha developing the enhancement of Landport Brooks by restoring the Papermill Cut (chalk fed stream) and creating wetland features suitable for a wide range of species, complimented by public access and interpretation panels.
 - This year, 761ha have been improved for nature through multiple mechanisms. The ReNature grant has delivered 4% of habitat improvement in 2023/24. SDNPA Volunteers have contributed 16ha of nature improvement through activities including the removal of invasive non-native species such as Parrot's Feather and scrub management at Burnt House Dew Pond. 150 mixed species trees were planted at Golden Horn Farm - a developing mushroom farm which was previously an arable field. Other significant contributions have been delivered at SSCP (71ha) and through the Changing Chalk project (59ha).
 - Habitat/Site Maintenance: This year 1,248ha of additional land have been maintained through mechanisms such as conservation grazing. Cattle collars for 23 rare breed Shetland cattle were purchased through the Re-Nature grant. These cattle will graze 450ha across Longmoor and Woolmer and will control the purple moor grass (Molinia) and scrub, keeping the heathland habitats on site in good ecological condition and open for people to enjoy and explore.

FiPL projects have supported 649ha of conservation grazing through the provision of water infrastructure for grazing livestock at Hinton Ampner.

The remaining maintenance hectares were delivered through area teamwork re-visiting sites for cut and collect.

- H1.3: Throughout Q3 and Q4, 12 new sites are on the Nature Based Solutions pipeline waiting for agreements to be signed.
- H1.4: Several sites have had land put forward for nature recovery during this period totalling 202.9ha. These includes those from Adur and Worthing Council who have

put land forward for nature recovery at Cissbury Fields (40ha) Pad Farm (17 ha) and New Salts Farm (28 ha).

- The establishment of long-term agreements with landowners can be challenging and this has been an issue for the Changing Chalk Grazing Project as well as the Landscape Recovery Programme (Arun Valley bid failed for the second time).

Changing Chalk Grazier Project – a deeper look

During this reporting period, we undertook a thorough review of project progress. Delivery has slowed significantly from year one due to a variety of issues: the sites being targeted for grazing are complex, owners have proven reluctant to sign the licence agreement (concerns about longevity); and other forms of funding, particularly now the Farming in Protected Landscape funding has become available.

Unfortunately, a significant project, the planned grazing hub on Brighton and Hove Council's land at Stanmer, will not be able to go ahead this financial year because of issues with the tenancy.

The significant restructuring in agricultural funding created by Brexit continues - although the basic payment scheme is reducing, the government announced significant increases in the funding of grassland habitats under Countryside Stewardship. Although this is welcome, this means that the project is addressing a significantly different funding landscape than was envisaged during its inception. For this reason, a mid-project review has been commissioned by the Eastern Downs Facilitation team looking at the progress of the project so far and identifying what potential support is required by landowners and graziers in the light of the increased chalk grassland agri-environment funding.

Grazing of sites with ponies continued to be funded. Additionally, a new start up grazing operation was provided with capital items (which could not be funded through other mechanism, i.e. Farming in Protected Landscapes) to enable the movement of stock between sites and security of stock on sites.

Some capital requirements to support grazing have either been supplied by other funding sources (Farming in Protected Landscapes). The Pony grazing hub (at Lullington) has been funded by SDNPA independently of the Changing Chalk grazing project.

Pony Power! Chalk grassland is a crucial part of the Park landscape. The habitat needs careful management, particularly grazing, to keep it in good condition. Getting the right animal in the right place for the right amount of time is crucial.

One of the most significant successes of the Changing Chalk grazing project is the expansion of the Longridge pony herd. Unlike cattle, ponies aren't subject to TB movement restrictions, so can be moved from site to site. Conventional farm livestock are part of farmers' outputs - they need to gain weight to be sold. Ponies are purely kept for conservation grazing and the type of ponies used have 'hard mouths', i.e. they like to eat scrub and unpalatable grasses which other livestock avoid. Like any other animal, their welfare is paramount and they need to be checked and watched by experienced handlers to balance the needs of the habitat with their welfare.

- H1.5: Total hectares of habitat creation and improvement funded by The South Downs National Park Trust

The data methodology for this KPI is being finalised in Q1 2024/25 with data expected in Q2 2024/25 corporate performance reporting.

2.5 **HLT#2: Work to maintain, enhance and/or restore 30% of existing Core Nature sites and support key species recovery within the SDNP by 2030.**

2.5.1 This HLT is measured using the indicators shown in Table 2.

Table 2 HLT2: Work to maintain, enhance and/or restore 30% of existing Core Nature sites and support key species recovery within the SDNP by 2030

KPI	KPI Target (yrs 4-5)	KPI contribution 2023/24
H2.1 Total extent of Core Nature sites where SDNPA activity is contributing towards favourable condition	3,541ha	N/A
H2.2 Number of species recovery programmes developed for delivery from 2023	TBC	N/A

- 2.5.2 A highlight of progress towards nature HLT2 in Q3/Q4 includes Re-Nature Grant funding cattle collars at Longmoor and Woolmer to facilitate appropriate grazing of up to 455ha of designated heathland and scrub.
- 2.5.3 H2.1: The launch of the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework has superseded this KPI with the announcement of the target to bring 80% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042 and the national target to restore or create more than 250,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within Protected Landscapes, outside protected sites by 2042 (from a 2022 baseline). This KPI cannot be evidenced until all the new Protected Landscaped Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF) data had been received. The target for the South Downs National Park (the Park as a whole not just the Authority) will be apportioned in 2024/25 and monitoring data will be released by Natural England from April 2025.
- 2.5.4 However, work against this KPI has continued with the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme for Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) finalised and now in place. This forms the core of the landscape management programme for the Country Park for the next 5 years. At SSCP, restoration of chalk grassland has continued and an area of vegetated shingle has been fenced off to protect ground nesting birds. A new grazer has also been secured.
- 2.5.5 The Cockshut stream and wetland restoration will also support an improvement to the condition of Lewes Brooks SSSI.
- 2.5.6 Capturing core nature data continues to be challenging as we rely on monitoring by Natural England (NE) for SSSIs and Local Authorities/ Local Record Centres for LWSs. Locally we will be working with the NE Area Teams to see if we can fast track SSSI condition assessments. In addition, the SSSI condition assessment methodology has recently changed and is now "whole feature" based.
- 2.5.7 H2.2: A species prioritisation exercise was completed earlier this year which identified a shortlist of species to consider for long-term monitoring. This shortlist has now been refined in consultation with key colleagues and relevant partners/experts and finalised at the end of Q4.
- 2.5.8 Birds, bats, butterflies and bees will be the key focus for the South Downs from 2024/25 and trend data demonstrating the abundance and or distribution of farmland birds and butterflies across the South Downs National Park will be procured from the South Downs Farmland Bird Initiative and the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme in 2024. The data will be used to engage landowners and partners and to inform action which can be taken to improve habitats to support and encourage these species to thrive. SDNPA is working with key partners to explore options to procure accurate bat trend population data cut to the National Park boundaries.
- 2.5.9 Trend data for bees is not available due to the lack of data from monitoring schemes – however the “The Bees of Sussex” by James Power, published in February 2024 names Sussex as “one of the richest, most diverse counties in Britain for bees”. The accompanying maps, photos and information in the atlas will be used to engage audiences with bees and bee conservation.
- 2.6 **HLT#3: To prepare for and implement Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)**

2.6.1 This HLT is measured using the indicators shown in Table 3.

Table 3 HLT3: To prepare for and implement Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

KPI	KPI Target (yrs 4-5)	KPI contribution (recorded 23/24 for period 22/23)
H3.1 The requirement is for relevant applications to achieve at least a 10% biodiversity net gain increase from the pre-development biodiversity value.	10% BNG increase (min)	26.77%

- For the monitoring period April 2022-March 2023, applications generally considered to be likely within scope for the future BNG mandatory requirements were reviewed. This excluded applications which were, for example, householder applications, small scale self-build, works only to existing structures (e.g. replacement windows), change of use applications of existing buildings, temporary development under 2 years, development that would impact less than 25 square meters of habitat, Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), discharge of conditions or amendments to proposals already permitted.
- Of these, **over 63%** of planning applications included biodiversity measures, either directly linked to achieving biodiversity net gain or as general biodiversity enhancements but **were not measured** using the BNG Metric.
- Twelve planning applications included measurements of BNG using the Metric. The 12 applications that used a BNG Metric delivered a net total of **23.71 habitat** Biodiversity Units (BU), **9.85 hedgerow** biodiversity units and **0.35 watercourse** units.
- The average BNG recorded for this monitoring period is 26.77%. Figures recorded in our annual [Authority Monitoring Report \(AMR\)](#) demonstrate BNG is well above the forthcoming 10% requirement for these applications.
- It should also be noted that while use of the Metric is not mandatory, the figures reported represent a snapshot of what can be achieved. The types of applications using the Metric are generally larger sites with ecologists already involved in the project.
- Most applications tend to be smaller scale within the National Park. A beta test version of the Small Sites Metric was released in July 2021. We have seen some limited uptake of the small sites Metric this year. We may see more use of this going forward as we approach mandatory BNG for smaller sites too.

Climate Action

2.7 **HLT#4: South Downs National Park Authority to reduce its carbon footprint by 150 tonnes per annum in line with the 2030 net zero target**

2.7.1 This HLT is measured using the indicators shown in Table 4 through analysis of SDNPA Scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emissions using the DEFRA carbon calculation spreadsheet.

Table 4

KPI	Year	KPI Target (yrs 4-5)	SDNPA (Tonnes CO2)	Change on previous year (Tonnes)
H4.1 Total annual SDNPA carbon emissions	2023/24	-150 tonnes (CO2) on previous year	278.21	-4.8
	2022/23		283.01	+16.44
	2021/22	Original Baseline (not including work at SSCP)	266.57	

- 2.7.2 Although we recorded a small decrease in emissions this year, the KPI baseline will need to be amended as we bring the remaining properties at SSCP online. Development of the Foxhole cottages will increase carbon emission figures next year before we start to see reductions against a new baseline.
- 2.7.3 The most notable reductions this year were from SDNPA vehicle emissions – down from 28.61 tonnes CO2e in 22/23 to 25.82, and electricity usage at Seven Sisters Country Park – down from 40.70 tonnes CO2e in 22/23 to 26.24. This was partially due to the installation of energy efficient lighting and equipment in many areas but also due to the absence of contractors working on the buildings in the winter months as in previous years.
- 2.7.4 However, emissions from scope three increased due to a large water leak at SSCP which took a while to find and fix.
- 2.7.5 Improvements during Q3/Q4 include moving the SDC electricity supply contracts, and all but one at SSCP, to Ecotricity, the only UK based 100% renewable supplier.
- 2.7.6 The main energy efficiency works project at Seven Sisters has been completed with the works to the external insulation and render at the SDC almost complete. Other progress at both the SDC and SSCP, include replacement LED lighting and the installation of new PV panels. Five replacement hybrid pool cars have been ordered and are due to arrive in April 2024.
- 2.8 **HLT#5: 5% reduction per annum in the overall carbon footprint of the South Downs National Park from the baseline reported in 2019**
- 2.8.1 This HLT is measured using the indicators shown in Table 5.

Table 5

<p>HLT5 5% reduction per annum in the overall carbon footprint of the South Downs National Park from the baseline reported in 2019</p>	<p>H5.1 Total tonnes CO2 reported year on year in annual LULUCF (Forestry component) data.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total verified carbon savings achieved from accredited planting schemes under the Woodland Carbon Code (expressed as a % against the target).
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- 2.8.2 Small World Consulting, in collaboration with other Protected Landscapes, are finalising a carbon monitoring dashboard to track progress with our Net Zero and nature-based targets and towards achieving our Net Zero target date of 2045. This will allow for annual updates using both national emissions data and local data on nature-based solutions such as new woodland planting or other habitat restoration. Small World Consulting will re-baseline SDNPA for 2022 using the tracker, which has a number of methodological differences with the 2019 assessment. This is necessary because the Department for Energy Security & Net Zero (DESNZ) revised their methodology for reporting on the Land Use component of the UK level targets to improve the accuracy. This has impacted the 2019 baseline for the UK

National Parks so the decision was taken to recalculate this element of the SDNP baseline to reflect the new methodology. From this point, we will track progress for 2023 onwards.

- 2.8.3 Whilst we await the delivery of the carbon monitoring dashboard, which is expected in July 2024, we estimate progress as a 5% reduction from 2022/23 based on Nature Recovery and Woodland Planting activity. We will be able to confirm that in July when we can run the modelling based on the most recent 2022-23 data. There is inevitably a lag with the data as we wait for the most recent data to be issued by DESNZ for the previous year. Data covering 2023/24 will be issued in June/July 2024.
- 2.8.4 This year, 250k was secured through the Innovate UK Pathfinder Parks project to support collaboration with our key Local Authority, sector partners and local Communities to accelerate progress on Net Zero using a platform developed by our project delivery partner, OnePlanet. The project commenced in Q4. To support the delivery of the Innovate UK project, as well as our own Climate Action Plan, we successfully recruited a new Climate Change Officer.
- 2.8.5 The project pipeline for this year included supporting education and outreach on climate change for schools and local communities. For example, the Petersfield Climate Action Network (PeCAN) Education and Outreach Project has been delivering a Schools Engagement and Community Outreach programme that will transfer knowledge and skills, inspire behaviour change and coordinate positive practical community-action to mitigate and adapt to the climate emergency. By the end of Q4, the schools programme had reached over 600 KS2 children since the start of the academic year, significantly more than would be reached by a single 'event' conference.
- 2.8.6 SDNPA have also worked to develop a methodology for understanding the carbon baseline for the UK National Trails with the approach to be piloted first for the South Downs Ways and the Pennine Way.

A National Park for All

- 2.9 A National Park for All Theory of Change model was developed during 2023/24 resulting in smarter, updated KPIs reflected in Table 6 below.
- 2.10 **HLT#6: Increase diversity of those engaging with the South Downs National Park**
- 2.10.1 This HLT is measured using the indicators shown in Table 6.

Table 6

KPI	KPI Target (yr 4)	KPI contribution Q3/Q4*
H6.1 Number of people from underrepresented audiences engaged through engagement & project activities	100	1,389
H6.2 Number of engagement activities targeted at underrepresented audiences	30	253

**Please note, data against these KPIs has only been collected from Q3 onwards and includes retrospective data for 2023-24 as a whole.*

- 2.10.2 Targets for the new KPIs were greatly underestimated. New targets will be developed for year 5 of the Corporate Plan.
- 2.10.3 A new data monitoring form has been implemented to improve the demographic data reported about the number of people engaged through engagement and project activities. This went live in Q3.
- 2.10.4 Example of progress towards HLT6 in Q3/Q4 include:

- In Q4, engagement was initiated through 7 school sessions engaging 475 young people. This included a careers fair at Midhurst Rother College and an Open Door Green-Careers day at Butts Brow with the Eastern Rangers for Hazel Court Special school.
- In addition, we ran 4 South Downs Youth Action days engaging 17 young people in positive action from nature and climate. Activities included heathland habitat management, accessible path clearance and identifying wildlife through iNaturalist.
- Our H&WB work included leading a walk at SSCP for refugees and asylum seekers in partnership with the Sanctuary Café, Eastbourne and an activity session at SSCP for children, families and their key workers in collaboration with the East Sussex Early Help team.
- For the HeRe SAMM project, 98 people attended a "night under the stars" engagement event focused on Dark Skies.
- The Central Team hosted 4 events with Mind Conservation Group engaging people facing health and access inequalities in nature reserve management tasks
- 434 people attended a Stargazing Event at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard - engaging urban fringe communities in the work of the South Downs National Park
- As part of other progress, we are preparing to launch a community travel grant as a result of learning from our pilot and outdoor learning travel grant. The scheme will be available to community and voluntary groups as well as social prescribers. They are best placed to identify people who might be interested in and benefit from connection to nature by participating in a range of different activities in the South Downs National Park.

It will allow local community organisations to claim a grant to help with the cost of transport and other support to help our target audiences visit the National Park.

The grant scheme will be administered by the South Downs National Park Authority. Community Transport Sussex will act as the link to community groups and as broker for community transport organisations that might want to participate in the scheme. They will also ensure that transport providers are compliant for Safeguarding and Health and Safety. The South Downs Trust has been successful in doubling the money we had set aside for the first year. We hope to be able to support 20 visits.

2.11 HLT#7: Work to make sure the landscape, scenery and tranquillity of SDNP is available to everyone, no matter what their access needs are.

2.11.1 Q3/Q4 progress against HLT7 is monitored through key performance indicators outlined in Table 7.

Table 7 Progress against HLT7: Increase the diversity of those engaging with the South Downs National Park

KPI	KPI Target (yrs 4-5)	KPI contribution Q1/Q2	KPI contribution Q3/Q4	Cumulative progress to date
H7.1 Number of sessions facilitated by mobility equipment*	100	66	85	151
H7.2 Metres of new and/or improved accessible path	Baseline to be established in 2023/24	4,550	1,220	5,770
H7.3 Number of visits to the digital Accessibility Hub	5000	6,119**	5,141	11,260

H7.4 Number of page views of the Seven Sisters Country Park Accessibility Guide	Baseline to be established in 2023/24	2,374**	1,071	3,445
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* These figures currently represent bookings at SSCP only.

**These figures have been updated since the Q2 report as Q1/Q2 data was missed.

- 2.11.2 As at the end of Q4, SSCP have had 151 bookings for the mobility scooters. These include both regulars and 'one off' users. Partner organisations have also had regular use of the mobility equipment.
- 2.11.3 1,220 meters of path have been created or improved to increase accessibility to the Park over Q3/Q4. Creation of new routes include sections of the Centurion Way and Egret's Way.
- 2.11.4 In Q3, just over 900 metres of badly gullied sections of the South Downs Way National trail were improved to provide an easier more accessible surface, east of Truleigh Hill. The surface was re-graded and new chalk and flint material was laid and compacted with regular rainwater run-off drainage gullies built at regular intervals.
- 2.11.5 Working in partnership with West Sussex County Council's Countryside team, we rebuilt both approach ramps to the River Adur bridleway crossing, which carries the South Downs Way and the Downs Long path. The ramps were stabilised with cement stabilisation to remove the erosion steps that had developed. A new ramp was also constructed from the A283 layby to facilitate better access.
- 2.11.6 In Q4, the new and improved West Dean access ramp (south), connecting the Centurion Way with West Dean village was completed this quarter. The ramp now provides good smooth step free access to the trail as an alternative to the step steps.
- 2.11.7 In addition to physical route surface improvements, our Audio Trails continue to be downloaded.
- 2.11.8 This year, we launched the Cuckmere Accessible Audio Trail which follows the route of the Cuckmere Miles Without Stiles route and enables users to scan a QR code located on public benches to listen to five unique audios with commentary and soundscapes including egrets fishing in the salt marsh, crickets stridulating under the dark night skies and skylarks trilling. This audio trail is an opportunity for those who are partially sighted to experience the wonders of the Park through audio. Each recording also comes in a video format with subtitles, giving access to those who may have auditory impairment.
- 2.11.9 Increasing accessibility for all to the National Park continues to be a key focus for our work. In addition to establishing the Accessibility Hub on the website, we have produced information and content around disability and access - a look at how the mobility scooters funded a year ago have been used by the public; plus, we have spotlighted disabled access for Disabled Access Day in our newsletter.
- 2.12 **HLT#8: Digitally engage 100,000 people per year with the SDNP**
- 2.12.1 Q3/Q4 progress against HLT8 is monitored through key performance indicators outlined in Table 8.

Table 8 Progress against HLT8: Digitally engage 100,000 people per year with the SDNP

KPI	KPI Target (yr4)	KPI at Q4 2023	KPI at Q4 2024	% annual change
H8.1 Total number of E-newsletter subscribers	11,500	10,638	11,989	+13%
H8.2 Total social media audience	85,000	79,349	97,774	+23%
H8.3 Total visits to the hubs throughout the year: (Nature Recovery, Climate Change, Walking hub, Communities*)	20,000	-	59,410	N/A

*Total visits to the hubs throughout the year does not include the Communities hub which has not yet launched

2.12.2 There are now 11,989 subscribers for main SDNP e-newsletter and 1,280 subscribers for the Planning e-newsletter.

2.12.3 SDNPA has a total social media audience of 97,774 followers. This total includes the SDNPA, SSCP and SDNPT social media channels.

2.12.4 Our combined social media audience continues to grow. In the last quarter our hybrid Dark Skies Festival saw lots of engagement with our social channels reaching 273,275 people and getting 11,551 engagements and 4,415 views of our online Dark Skies Discovery Pack.

2.12.5 In Q4 we had over 1,000 sign ups to our SDNPA e-newsletter, largely driven by initiatives such as our Advent calendar quiz.

2.12.6 Other highlights from our digital work in the last year include:

- The launch of our walking, accessibility and climate change hubs, providing a one-stop shop on these key issues. Our walking hub, launched in May, has since grown from strength to strength with routes, themes articles, Miles without Stiles and more. This has led to 21,089 visitors to the walking hub by the end of the year. We have used our SDNPA e-newsletter and social media channels to drive traffic to these hubs.
- Our hybrid festivals. Our ReNature and Dark Skies Festivals have enabled us to reach and engage with large audiences. The digital content for the ReNature Festival alone was seen by over 250,000 people with over 44,000 views of the videos created and released during the festival.
- We have focused on producing a wide range of video content and that has really paid dividends across our digital channels including our YouTube channel which has doubled subscribers in the last year.

3. Progress against Corporate Plan Priorities

Place Making

3.1 Quarterly progress has been monitored through the key performance indicators outlined in Table 9.

Table 9 Progress against Place Making - CPI & CP2

Corporate Plan Priority	KPI	KPI contribution Q1/Q2	KPI contribution Q3/Q4	Cumulative total 2023/24
CPI Administer the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and S106	CP1.1 The total CIL and S106 distributed (in £) across the three HLTs	£ 831,973	£878,275	£1,710,248
CP2 Provide specialist advice in respect of Conservation, Design and Landscape across the organisation	CP2.1 Summary of service provided to be included in the Authority's Annual Monitoring Report	Highlights from the annual AMR report are included in commentary		

3.2 Highlights of progress towards CPI include:

- In Q3/Q4, CIL distributed £364,841; this has been spent on Nature Recovery and National Park for All projects. Some of the projects funded include Petersfield's Library Community Hub, improvements to the Chaplaincy Building at Beachy Head, accessible play equipment in Greatham and improvements to play / outdoor equipment for Schools in Droxford and Lewes.
- In Q3/Q4, S106 distributed £513,434. This has been spent on projects including delivery of affordable housing in Winchester and Westbourne plus 32 new affordable homes in Lewes (former Pells Primary School Site); changing places toilets, highway improvements and the Solent recreation mitigation fund.

3.3 Highlights of progress towards CP2 include:

- A new Conservation Officer recruited at the end of 2023; the Lewes Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan has since been completed and adopted.
- Conservation, Landscape and Design: Provided timely advice to DM and Major Projects team on multiple planning applications and pre-apps.
- Landscape: 2 x written reports for hearings/appeals; assisting with Local Plan Review, assisting with Petworth development brief.
- Design: lead on Petworth development brief; preparation for 2024 Design Awards; organise Design Review Panel

Generating income

3.4 In line with the proposals agreed at Policy & Resources Committee, full applications over £50k are shared with the Committee Chair. We have also agreed to keep Members sighted on these applications through regular reports to Policy & Resources Committee. Table 10 below, includes everything submitted since our last report to Policy & Resources Committee which has now received a final outcome. These will not be reported to Committee in future as they are now redundant or sit within our project reporting.

Table 10

Funder & Scheme	Project	Status	Value	Lead
UK Research Innovation Net Zero Living Pioneer Places	Demonstrator bid – SDNPA only	Successful	£127,581	SDNPA
Innovate UK Net Zero Living Pioneer Places Award	Pathfinder Bid - National Roll-out	Unsuccessful	£2,816,580	SDNPA

DEFRA Water in protected landscapes fund	Riverscape Revival: Sustaining Seven Sisters' Water Ecosystems	Successful	£516,000	SDNPA
National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative	Hampshire Hangers	Successful	£298,699	SDNPA
Winchester Rural Shared Prosperity Fund	Woodland Carbon Platform	Successful	£75,000	SDNPA
DEFRA Landscape Recovery Initiative	Nature Recovery in the Arun Valley	Unsuccessful	£731,280	SDNPA
OFWAT	Fixing Phosphate Mitigation in the South Downs and Beyond	Unsuccessful (EOI)	£50,000	SDNPA
SELEP GBF Underspend	Seven Sisters Camping Barn Uplift	Unsuccessful	£381,000	SDNPA

3.5 Applications over £50k, currently in consideration, can be seen in Table 11. These will be reported in future updates until they have achieved a final outcome.

Table 11

Funder & Scheme	Project	Status	Value	Lead
NEIR III	Voluntary Biodiversity Units	Full bid submitted - decision pending	£99,705	SDNPA
NHLF	Downs to the Sea	Development Bid successful. Full bid submitted, decision pending	£1.6 million	SD Trust in partnership with SDNPA
National Grid LEI	Woolbeding – Expanding the view	EOI successful, full application in progress	£300,000	SDNPA

3.6 Quarterly progress has been monitored through the key performance indicators outlined in Table 12.

Table 12 Progress against Generating income - CP3 & CP4

Corporate Plan Priority	KPI	KPI Target (yr4)	KPI contribution Q1/Q2	KPI contribution Q3/Q4	Cumulative progress to date
CP3 Aim to raise £2.5 million self-generated income p.a. through bids to Statutory sources & support for the SDNP Trust in	CP3.1 Total self-generated income raised (£)	£2.5m	£629,750	£1,379,752	£2,009,502

continuing to build a philanthropic income stream.					
CP4 Incubate a number of income generating initiatives, building on Seven Sisters and the South Downs Trust	CP4.1 Total income (£) generated through the new Green Finance Off Set and Brokering service	£805,945	£215,673	£79,266	£294,940
	CP4.2 Number of new income generating pilots	1	3	0	3
	CP4.3 Total income (£) generated through core cost recovery on externally funded projects	£200K	£0	£400k	£400k

- 3.7 Highlights from Q3/Q4 against KPIs are detailed below:
- 3.8 Overall, we have marked our income status as ‘Amber’ RAG because we fell short of the targets for CP3.1 and CP4.1.
- 3.9 CP 3.1: The Team engaged with the Water in Protected Landscapes funding initiated by DEFRA at the end of Q3 resulting in £516,000 funding for vital restorations at Seven Sisters. Additional significant success in the last quarter include £127,000 from Innovate UK for expanding our One Planet initiative and £298,000 from National Grid to support the Selbourne Hangers. In addition, the South Downs Trust secured over £800,000 in new funding, with allocations including £100,000 for the Centurion Way project alongside support for apprenticeships, habitat improvements, and educational visits.
- 3.10 CP4.1: Uncertainty stemming from government proposals to eliminate Nitrate Mitigation Zones in Q3 cooled the market and reduced the potential for Green Finance income from approximately £800,000 to £300,000. This forecasted reduced income of £300,000 was agreed with the SDNPA CEO in Q3.
- 3.11 The ReNature Credits work has generated approx. £280K of our year 1 achievement. During Q4 we have also been building a strong pipeline to be realised in 24/25.
- 3.12 CP4.2: We continue to develop a BNG Readiness Set Up Service with delivery partners, Rural Solutions Ltd, which we hope to go live in Spring in readiness for an announcement at the Green Finance Summit on 23rd May, Q1 2024/25. We are in advanced conversations with four neighbouring Councils who will hopefully become the first customers for this service. The WEP set up service is live and available to offer to LPAs.
- 3.13 CP4.3: £400K of the DEFRA Water in Protected Landscapes fund is through cost recovery.

Land Management

- 3.14 Quarterly progress has been monitored through the key performance indicators outlined in Table 13.

Table 13 Progress against Land management – CP5 & CP6

Corporate Plan Priority	KPI	KPI Target (yrs4-5)	KPI contribution Q1/Q2	KPI contribution Q3/Q4	Cumulative progress to date
CP5 Facilitate and support the endorsement, actions and key priorities through the process of Whole Estate Plans (WEPs)	CP5.1 No. of Estates with new endorsed WEPS	N/A	0	0	0
	CP5.2 No. of estates working towards an endorsed WEP	N/A	Reported Annually	6	6
CP6 Deliver the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme in the National Park	CP6.1 Total funding (£) allocated across the Defra themes of People/ Place/ Nature/ Climate	£602,868 FiPL Year 3 programme budget	£567,852	£34,360	£602,212

- 3.15 There are currently 6 Estates with WEPs at various points in the WEP Process. These are; Firle Estate, Bereleigh Estate, Westerlands Estate, Glynde Estate (27th Feb 2024 Member site visit), Lancing College (21st May 2024 Member site visit) and Plumpton College (Member site visit TBC).
- 3.16 Glynde Estate hosted a Member Site Visit in February 2024 with aspirations to accelerate work on the WEP towards an endorsement at the late Q3/ early Q4 (24/25).
- 3.17 Work has commenced during Q4, working in collaboration with the Performance and Projects Team, to offer a new monitoring system to enable WEPs to share valuable data on their environmental achievements gained across their Estates. This work will continue into Q1 of 24/25 where we will pilot the new system with a sample of the Estates before rolling out further.
- 3.18 Of a programme budget for 2023/24 of £602,868, final programme spend totalled £602,211.85 (equating to 99.9% of budget). This funding was awarded to 37 projects approved in 2023/24. The underspend of £656.15 was the result of final costs for materials/items in a number projects being slightly less than initial cost projections.
- 3.19 Projects approved in Q3/Q4 include: the facilitation of farm educational visits; purchase of a solar panel water pump to help fill a header tank in a remote location which will supply water to assist regenerative grazing practices; use of a robotic flail mower, with a forestry mulcher attachment, to help control large/dense scrub vegetation on four chalk grassland (priority habitat) sites.

Economy

- 3.20 Quarterly progress has been monitored through the key performance indicators outlined in Table 14.

Table 14 Progress against Economy – CP7 & CP8

Corporate Plan Priority	KPI	KPI Target (yrs4-5)	KPI contribution Q1/Q2	KPI contribution Q3/Q4	Cumulative progress to date
CP7 Develop the 'Our South Downs' enterprise network	CP7.1 No of businesses signed up	Baseline to be established in 2023/24	179	196	375
	CP7.2 No. of Green South Downs certified businesses	Baseline to be established in 2023/24	19	8	27
	CP7.3 No. of businesses signed up to South Downs Guardian	Baseline to be established in 2023/24	Due Q4	0	0
	CP7.4 No. of businesses signed up to South Downs Protector	Baseline to be established in 2023/24	Due Q4	2	2
	CP7.5 Total unrestricted income generated in £	Baseline to be established in 2023/24	£210	£44,070*	£44,280
CP8 Tourism in the South Downs National Park	CP8.1 No. of businesses signed up to Visitor Giving	Baseline to be established in 2023/24	2	1	3

*This figure has been adjusted to reflect previous income not captured, see commentary for details.

- 3.21 Membership of 'Our South Downs' (OSD) is at 375, a 273% increase year on year. The strategic goal was to get OSD to a 10% member rate of the business population in Visitor Economy, Food & Drink and Land Based, or a target of 330 members, which we have exceeded.
- 3.22 The uptick in growth of businesses signed up to 'Our South Downs' network was driven by two main things. Firstly, presenting and being a panellist at 3 sustainability events - which including having an Our South Downs stall to sign up businesses. Secondly, through a digital sign-up competition which offered a hamper of local South Downs produce as a prize. The strategy will now shift to one of organic growth.
- 3.23 Our new Green South Downs sign ups, since the pilot, has been achieved through speaking at events, Instagram growth and direct email campaigns. An agreement with PeCAN to sponsor 5 businesses through Green South Downs, plus new pipelines for funding from partner organisations such as Chichester District Council and Amex, should generate further sign ups in 2024/25.
- 3.24 The South Downs Guardian remains an unattractive option for businesses during tough trading conditions due to a large joining fee yet few benefits. It was agreed in Q3 2023/24 P&R Committee that this KPI will be removed and progress will be captured within CP7.5.
- 3.25 Both current South Downs Protectors have renewed their commitment, giving £10,000 each for 2024/25 indicating the relationships are being well managed.
- 3.26 CP 7.5: The figure has been adjusted to include income generated not previously captured:

- 2022/23 income - £20,000 from South Downs Protectors
- 2023/24 income - £20,000 from South Downs Protectors
- 2023/24 income - £4,070 from Visitor Giving.

- 3.27 Increased awareness in the business community of Visitor Giving through speaking at events and digital promotion has resulted in one sign up to Visitor Giving this quarter and a small number of leads. Woodfire Camping, with two sites in the SDNP, signed up for Visitor Giving in Q4.
- 3.28 It's challenging to get businesses to sign-up to Visitor Giving, as they are reluctant to increase costs for their customers during tough economic conditions. Additionally, growth activities are time and resource hungry (attending promotional events, networking, competition administration). The key lesson from our experience this year is to target one event and do it well with a team, rather than attending many events with only one staff member present.

Authority Process

- 3.29 Quarterly progress has been monitored through the key performance indicators outlined in Table 15.

Table 15 Progress against Authority Process – CP9

Corporate Plan Priority	KPI	KPI Target (yrs. 4-5)	KPI contribution Q3/Q4
CP9 Ensure that the organisation is more diverse and representative both in its staff and Members and considers Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in service delivery and policy development	CP9.1 Total % of EDI impact assessment forms complete	100%	100%

- 3.30 The new Performance Tracker platform launched in Q3. This platform requires all new projects to attach a completed EDI form with their project approval submission. This KPI is, therefore, now redundant. In 2024/25, we will look at new ways to measure organisational progress for EDI.

4. Projects in delivery

- 4.1 As of Quarter 4 end, there were 38 projects in delivery. This includes 34 projects with a green RAG rating and four projects with an amber RAG rating, these four are listed below:
- Adur Wetland Creation Feasibility Project (Pad Farm): this project is 0% complete. There are capacity issues with partners due to organisational restructuring which is causing a delay to the start of this project.
 - Changing Chalk - Grazier Post: this project is 60% complete. Since the inception of the project alternative funding sources, South Downs Renature funding and FIPL, have become available which offer alternative funding alongside the conventional routes of agri-environment. This has led to an underspend on the project.
 - Downs to the Sea (Development Phase): this project is 75% complete, due to finish at end of Q2 2024/25. There are potential delays in getting necessary permissions and consents from all relevant authorities. There are capacity issues of some of the partners.
 - Ebernoe and Butcherlands Landscape Enhancement Scheme: this project is 10% complete. The project has underspent quite significantly due to delays obtaining a felling licence from Forestry Commission for the proposed tree works. These works will be moved into year 2 of the project with the outputs delivered at that point.

- 4.2 The project dashboard at Appendix 3 compares 2022/23 and 2023/24 project delivery.

- The project number figures used include projects that span multiple years – new projects that started and projects that closed at some point during these annual periods.
- The value of projects in 2023-24 was approx. £15.6m, this is almost £6.76m less than in 2023/24. This difference is mainly due to a reduction in external funding.
- Please note, financial figures represent the value of projects from the two respective years - a project may be counted in both years if it spans multiple years.

5. Project Performance Reporting: Strategic Fund Implications

- 5.1 At the end of Q4, there is a balance of £121,451 unallocated in the Strategic Fund, this amount takes into account £125,818 that was allocated in Q3/Q4.

6. Annual Governance Statement

- 6.1 The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) 2022/23 detailed 6 actions for 2023/24. These are monitored and reported on quarterly. See Appendix 4 for progress on the Annual Governance Statement actions for Q4.

7. Human Resources & Health and Safety

- 7.1 The Human Resources & Health and Safety paper for 2022/23 detailed 8 actions for 2023/24. These are monitored and reported on quarterly. See Appendix 5 for progress on the Human Resources and Health and Safety actions for Q4.

8. Learning & Improvement

- 8.1 This first Learning and Improvement paper (see Appendix 6) demonstrates how learning and improvement will be taken forward through a new process developed in 2024/25, due to be implemented in 2024/25.
- 8.2 This paper also outlines points of learning that have influenced strategy and delivery across the organisation this year, as well as highlighting areas for improvement and areas that have been improved.

9. Compliments, Comments and Complaints

- 9.1 This year's report can be found at Appendix 7.
- 9.2 During this year, the SDNP received 13 compliments and 43 complaints about its services. Of these 43 complaints, two were in relation to Corporate Strategy, one related to CPM, with the remainder relating to the Planning function (including for the host planning authorities where they undertake planning work on our behalf). Of the 13 compliments, 3 were for Corporate Strategy and 10 for Planning.
- 9.3 During the reporting period, 25 comments on the services of the SDNPA were sent to the feedback team for review, this reflects a small percentage of the feedback the SDNPA received through other channels. Of these comments 23 provided positive feedback (5 - Corporate Strategy, 7 - CPM, 11 - Planning).
- 9.4 There were two complaint decisions received from the Ombudsman in the reporting year. Both cases were found in the Authority's favour. Summary information about compliments, comments and complaints and the Ombudsman's investigations is at Appendix xx.

10. Annual Review 2023/24

- 10.1 The Annual Review at Appendix 8 showcases the excellent work the Authority has undertaken this year to progress our Corporate Plan priorities.

11. Partnership Management Plan (PMP) Reporting 2023/24

- 11.1 Performance towards the PMP indicators is reported annually however in 2023/24 the Monitoring Environmental Outcomes in Protected Landscapes (MEOPL) datasets have been replaced by the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF). The data currently provided by the PLTOF does not provide the level of detail which was included in the MEOPL dataset meaning that it is not possible to report against the majority of the PMP indicators in 2023-24. Other datasets are only procured once in a PMP cycle.

The forthcoming PMP review will evaluate the existing PMP through analysis of existing data and measures taken by Partners .

12. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	Projects may come forward for approval in future. No further decisions are required as a direct result of this report.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	There are no direct resource implications to this report.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Value for money for individual projects and pieces of work are assessed at the development stage, midway through a project and at the end, through an evaluative process that is reported to this Committee. Setting aside a fund to support projects represents a positive return on investment as it enables projects to go ahead which might not otherwise.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	We have listed in the report and appendices which PMP outcomes and corporate plan objectives our corporate and project work link to
Links to other projects or partner organisations	Where appropriate these are set out in the report.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	Please see the Climate Action section of this report which sets out high level targets around climate action.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	None
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Yes - Priority area three outlines the projects that have a specific focus on encouraging all people including those with protected characteristics to engage with and access the National Park. Completed EDI assessments are required at project approval stage for projects across all priority areas from Q3 2023/24. Any issues identified are highlighted within this report.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal??	None
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	None
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	None
Are there any Data Protection implications?	None

13. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

13.1 Robust corporate planning and monitoring of performance are part of the mitigations for our corporate risk as detailed in the table below:

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Unforeseen changes to the level of funding provided by relevant Government departments for future years	Likely	Moderate	A robust monitoring and project approval system with regular reporting to relevant Committees on projects. The budget available is set to sit with a Corporate Plan, setting out clear priorities to support delivery of Partnership Management Plan outcomes.
There may be some risks to our reputation if we are unable to provide match funding for some of our larger projects. This would also potentially reduce the types of funding we were able to apply for.	Possible	Moderate	The main mitigation for this is to keep close scrutiny of the Strategic Fund and apply a rigorous prioritisation process when approving those projects that commit the SDNPA to significant funding over a number of years. Further mitigation for this risk is the work that will be carried out to generate income for the South Downs National Park and also potentially for the SDNPA.

Liz Gent

Performance and Projects Lead

South Downs National Park Authority

Contact Officer: Liz Gent

Tel: 01730 819238

Email: liz.gent@southdowns.gov.uk

- Appendices
- 1a/1b. Corporate Performance Summary 2023-24
 2. Corporate performance dashboard 2023-24
 3. Corporate project dashboard 2023-24
 4. Q4 2023-24 Annual Governance Statement update
 5. Q4 2023-24 Human Resources & Health and Safety update
 6. Learning & Improvement 2023-24
 7. CCC (Compliments, Comments, Complaints) report 2023-24
 8. SDNPA Annual Review 2023/2024

SDNPA Consultees Chief Executive; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services, Interim Business Service Manager; Countryside and Policy Managers

External Consultees None

Background Documents [Corporate Plan 2020-25 year 4-5 action plan](#)