

ANNUAL REVIEW 2024/25



FOREWORD

It's been a remarkable year for the South Downs National Park and very fitting that so much has been achieved as we celebrate our 15th birthday,

There have been some real breakthroughs, some firsts, as well as small and big wins that all weave together to tell the story of a National Park that's been on quite a journey since its creation 15 years ago.

Across all these achievements are people – and not just the hard-working staff at the Authority. All the good work is only possible because of strong partnerships, collaboration, shared innovation and, very often, the goodwill of the many landowners, farmers, local councils, parish councils, volunteers, charities and local communities.

So before saying anything more, we just want to say a big “thank you” to all involved – your hard work and dedication make this National Park an even better place to live, work, visit and enjoy. Your efforts are hugely appreciated.

Now on to the milestones – there have been a few.

We're officially over the halfway point in our ambitious ReNature initiative of creating and restoring 13,000 hectares of land for nature. There are new and much-needed wildlife havens thanks to major tree planting, new hedgerows, ponds, wetlands and wildflower

meadows. The target reached is an area bigger than the size of Portsmouth or Worthing and something we can all be really proud of.

Hugely encouraging is the ecological data demonstrating that “renaturing” is having a significant positive impact. The detailed reports on butterflies, natterjack toads and the River Meon that you can read in this document are fascinating and, looking to the future, food for thought on the many more successes we could achieve together.

Our green finance work has broadened rapidly in a short space of time and we were the first National Park to introduce Voluntary Biodiversity Credits – opening the door and welcoming businesses to be able to invest in high-integrity nature restoration. Our first Green Finance summit, attracting delegates from across the sector, was a highlight of the year.

Planning continues to play a huge role in nature recovery. Groundbreaking legal agreements securing land for wildlife, together with far exceeding our Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) targets, show just how vital our role as Local Planning Authority is. Fundamentally, we know that land stewardship, farming, business and development can all work harmoniously

Cover image: © SDNPA/Julia Vasylevska



for the greater good of restoring lost habitats, while also prioritising land for high-quality food production.

Our priorities have been Nature, Climate and a National Park for All, and on the latter, much has been achieved. It's wonderful that almost 7,000 people from under-represented groups have been able to connect with the National Park – an increase of more than 1,300 on the previous year. How fantastic it was to welcome Moulescoomb Primary School as the National Park's first Ambassador School in an urban setting. Its incredible learning hub will be enjoyed by thousands of children for many years to come, no doubt inspiring a lifetime connection with the outdoors for many of them.

As the second most visited National Park in the UK, the operational nuts and bolts are so important and we're pleased that the South Downs Way has had 18 new way markers, 22 gates repaired and 11 replaced.

Several thousand people have enjoyed the delights of the National Park through our events and engagement programme, not least the 2,000 who turned out on cold February nights to gaze in awe at the starry night skies above. As we prepare to mark the National Park's 10th birthday as an International Dark Sky Reserve, it's worth noting how this status opens us up to a whole new audience – many of whom might not ordinarily visit National Parks.

Climate action is now integral to so much of our project and community work. There were several high points during the year, including the launch of our first South Downs Climate Action Network and 4,000 schoolchildren learning about climate change at a conference.

And, last but by no means least, the impact of the Community Infrastructure Levy should be given praise. The sheer variety of community projects benefiting every year is extraordinary

and this year the £1.8m has been put to good use, from classroom extensions, to pathway improvements, and revamped village halls.

In a world facing unprecedented nature, climate, and economic crises, National Parks are needed more than ever and all the stories in this key document underline just what a huge difference we make. We want everyone to feel the difference of all this work when in the National Park, whether it is the vibrant sounds of nature or the calm tranquillity to be found when staring at our star-filled night skies. There will be many challenges ahead for the South Downs National Park, but our ambition and desire to make that difference will never falter.

We do 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 very special place.



Vanessa Rowlands
Chair



Siôn McGeever
Chief Executive

This Annual Review highlights some of our key achievements for 2024/2025 that link to the objectives laid out in our **Corporate Plan 2023-25**.

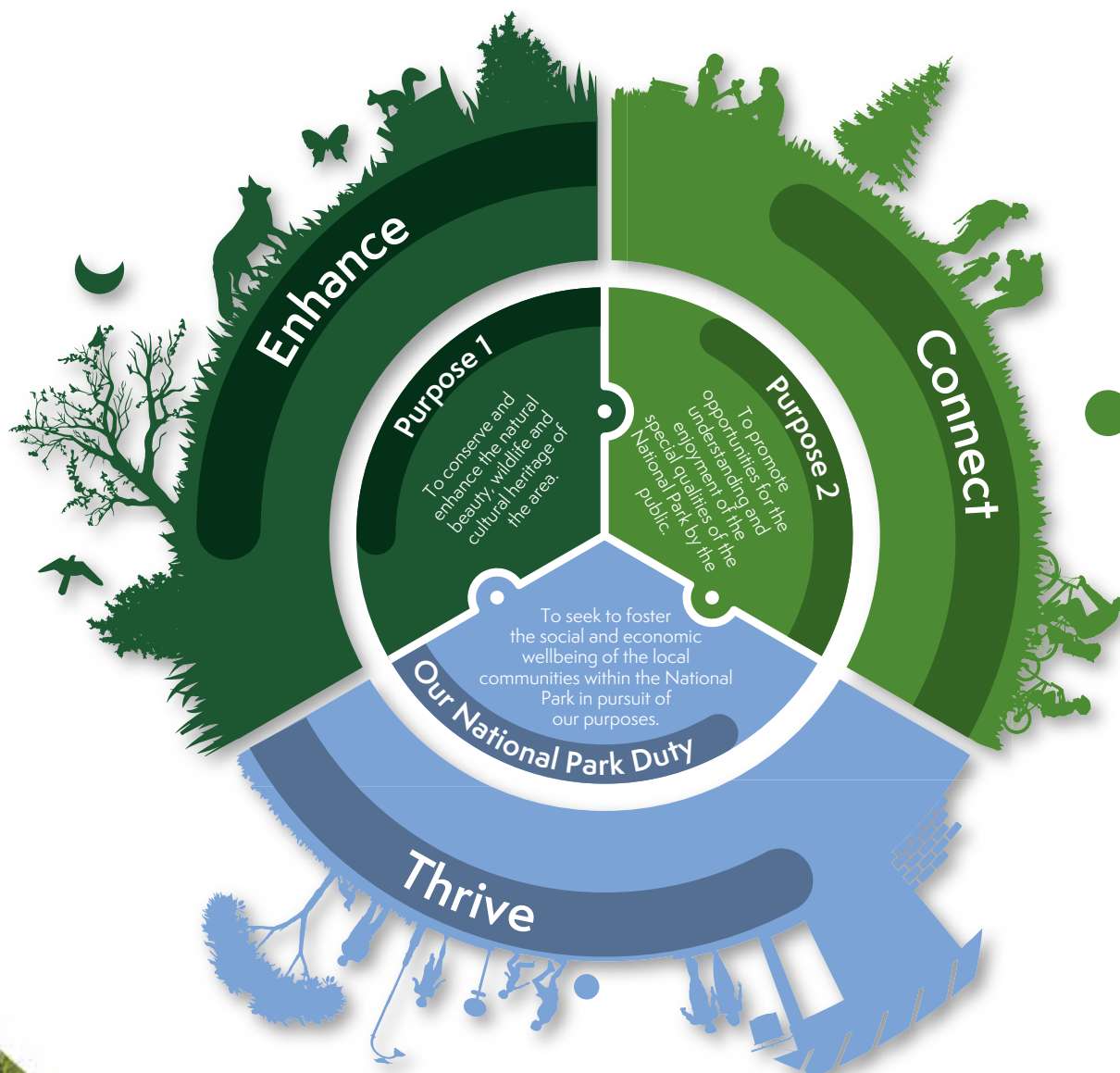


THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH WE WORK

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 **Partnership Management Plan** (PMP) sets out the overarching five-year strategy for the management of the South Downs National Park. It brings together and coordinates the aspirations of many different partners who help contribute towards the purposes and duty for which it was designated.

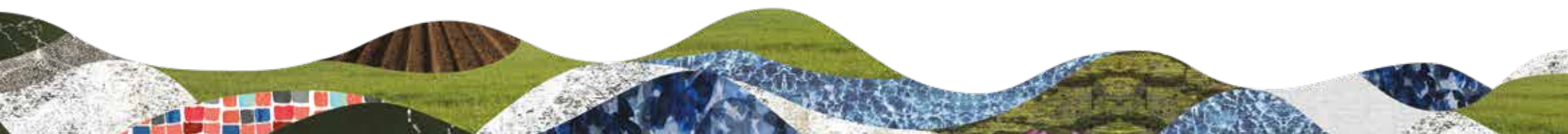
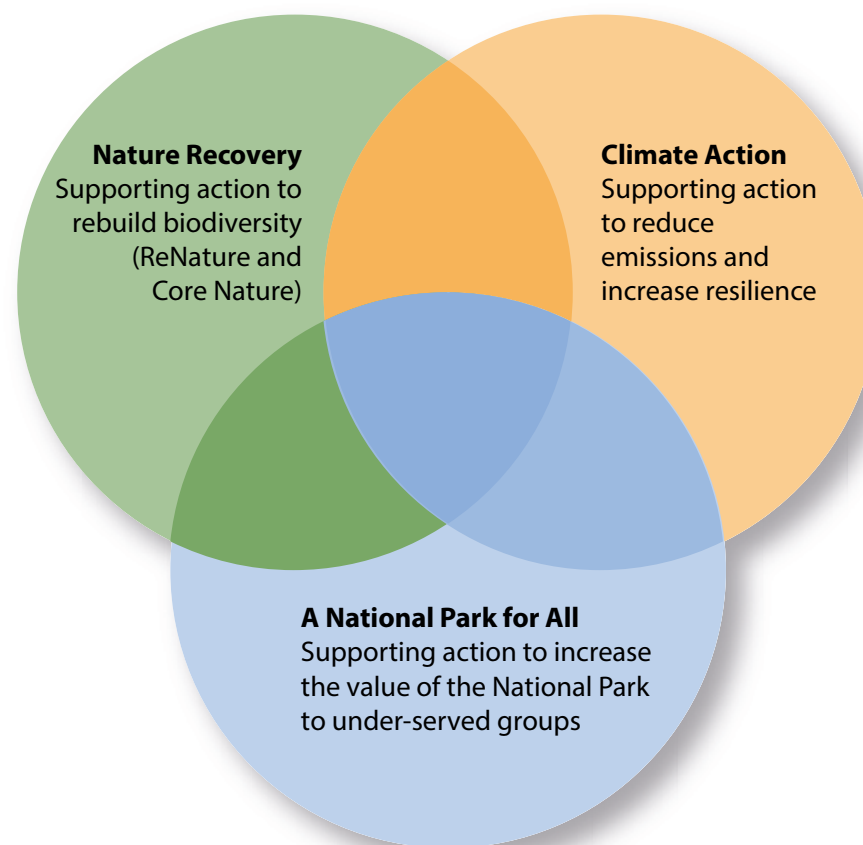
The South Downs National Park Authority's **Corporate Plan** sets out how we will deliver those elements of the South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan for which we are responsible.

Our current Corporate Plan (2020-2025) focuses on three High Level Targets (HLTs) of Nature Recovery, Climate Action and A National Park for All which broadly encompass the 10 outcomes in the PMP. Progress towards these HLTs are measured by monitoring overarching Key Performance Indicators for each HLT.

Since the release of the new **Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework** in Spring 2024, we have been testing a wider range of thematic areas for the development of our new Partnership Management Plan, and subsequent Corporate Plan, to ensure alignment with the new framework.

These themes are:

- Nature & Biodiversity
- Climate Action
- A National Park for All
- Landscape & Cultural Heritage
- Vibrant, Resilient Communities & Economy



CASE STUDY: SEVEN SISTERS

Seven Sisters Country Park have had another busy year during 2024/25.

The first-year delivery of the Countryside Stewardship Agreement saw at-scale seasonal grazing with a mix of cattle, sheep and ponies working with us to manage the SSSI protected landscape with a focus on maintaining and restoring chalk grassland. Recent survey results have brought encouraging news for biodiversity at SSCP. Dropwort, a key indicator species for healthy chalk grassland, has reappeared—signalling positive progress in habitat restoration efforts. Equally exciting is the spread of the red-star thistle, a very rare and nationally scarce species, which suggests that conservation measures are creating the right conditions for some of our most threatened flora to thrive.

External funding supported wetland enhancement works that included the restoration of sluice gates, creation of scrapes, re-grading the meanders and the deepening of ditches to improve habitats for wading birds. A new dew pond was created in the dry valley, supporting habitat connectivity between two previously restored dew ponds. Other investment into the site included a programme of boundary fence replacement and new gates along the South Downs Way.

Over the winter months, rangers were supported by in-house, corporate and youth action volunteers clearing an estimated 0.5 hectares of scrub from Haven Brow as part of our work to create a mosaic of habitats for nesting birds and insects.

Investment into visitor facilities at Exceat continued with the installation of a new sewage system plant to replace the reed bed and remove associated odours from site, along with new visitor Wi-Fi in the Visitor Centre.

Over 800,000 visitors came to Seven Sisters Country Park this year, and over 65,000 visitors were welcomed into the Visitor Centre, with many more using the other facilities at the Exceat Visitor hub. Our events programme grew to include wildlife and special interest talks and tours, self-led children's holiday activities and our third annual Christmas fayre was more popular than ever. Our private hire spaces also welcome local artist exhibitions, art workshops, young people and adult wellbeing activities alongside corporate hire events.

The www.cuckmerecottagesandcamping.co.uk facilities completed a successful first year of trading, with positive occupancy rates and customer feedback. A particular highlight



© SDNPA

included the use of the Camping Barn by youth activity and education groups engaging with nature and the landscape in an accessible way.

A key change to the management of Seven Sisters Country Park saw operations brought back in-house as part of SDNPA. This provides a more effective management process alongside cost savings.


SEVEN SISTERS
SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

1. NATURE & BIODIVERSITY

KPI	Total to date (2022-25)*	Annual 2024/25 Target*	Actual achieved 2024/25*	RAG Status
HLT1: To secure an additional 13,000ha, or 33% of land managed for nature by 2030 from a baseline of 25%	6,766ha of 13,000 target	1,300ha	491	●
HLT2: Maintain, enhance and/or restore existing key sites, habitats and species	Data for this target is now reported via the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF) which analyses changes in the extent and condition of priority and wildlife-rich habitat. Data for 2024/25 is awaited and this KPI will be reported on using case studies (see species recovery examples on pages 9-10).			
HLT3: To prepare for and implement Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)	N/A	Relevant applications to achieve 10% BNG increase from the pre-development biodiversity value	33.5%	●

*Please note that all hectares are estimated and these calculations are based on best available data.

Breakdown of HLT1 target achievements 2024/25:



*From previously committed land

INTRODUCTION

Action to deliver nature recovery continues but rates do ebb and flow as we rely on the availability of appropriate funding mechanisms, successful project feasibility and design, securing relevant permissions and consents as well as the vital importance of collaboration landowners/managers. Despite fewer nature recovery projects being delivered on the ground, significant projects and schemes continue to be developed and are in early feasibility stages. This should result in continued delivery (hectares) in future years. To date, 52% of the 13,000-hectare target for nature recovery by 2030 has been achieved. However, continued active management and maintenance will be essential to ensure nature thrives in the long term.

Earlier this year, the **Protected Landscape Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF)** were published by DEFRA and as a consequence our monitoring of Nature Recovery progress will change. Along with the National Parks England family, SDNPA are now working to interpret the published targets and collaborate on the target apportionment exercise lead by Natural England.

There is an imperative need for an up-to-date Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) condition assessment baseline for all SSSIs within the National Park which is essential to monitor the progress of HLT2, compounded by the published PLTOF targets for designated sites. The responsibility for SSSI condition assessments lies with Natural England (NE) who are currently limited on the number of assessments they can undertake annually. Discussion around assessments is happening nationally and the National Parks in England are collectively requesting the prioritisation of SSSI condition assessments in all Protected Landscapes.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Action for nature recovery continues through multiple mechanisms and involves numerous interventions to achieve connectivity in the landscape; this is vital to create a bigger, better, more and joined network of habitats. Some examples of progress this year include:

Hedgerows: This year has seen progress towards a Park-wide hedgerow initiative drawing on the expertise of a range of SDNPA staff, from rangers to the fundraising and farming teams. We have purchased historic hedgerow maps for the 1850-1900 period, commissioned the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) South East to design a holding level hedgerow plan, worked with the farmer groups to encourage landscape scale hedgerow projects which the fundraising team will help resource. This work is supported by practical delivery through projects delivered across the Park.

Chalk grassland: Condition assessments of non-designated chalk grassland surveys were completed. Each survey is summarised in a report to help support future management on each site.

Water: We have been working with all the catchments partnerships across the Park (including the Rother) to understand what the key issues are for “water and nature recovery” and how we can support these partnerships in addressing them. We will firm up plans for “water & nature” work to feed into our next Corporate Plan.

Securing land for nature: Land legally secured through ReNature Credits continues to evolve with new pipeline sites being negotiated. The South Downs is now benefitting from numerous nature markets operating to deliver nature recovery. These include: Biodiversity

Net Gain (BNG), Nutrient Neutrality, Woodland Carbon and Voluntary Biodiversity Credits (VBCs). Please see our case study on P.13 for more information.

Further collaboration: SDNPA continues to have significant involvement with the development of the **Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS)** that overlap with the Park, working with the Responsible Authorities. At present, **Hampshire LNRS** are consulting on their strategy and **pan-Sussex** approach will follow later this summer.

As connectivity in the landscape is so important to nature recovery SDNPA have commissioned a connectivity study. We have commissioned a literature and review of existing modelling tools and started to discuss the potential for joint projects with both the Weald 2 Waves and the Pine Marten South East project.

SSSI's: SDNPA is one of eight partners collaborating over the possible declaration of a Super National Nature Reserve emanating out of the existing Lullington Heath National Nature Reserve (NNR), with 280ha of SSSI land at Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) to be included in the new reserve. The application to Natural England is progressed closer to ‘declaration’.

Key Species: SDNPA species programme is now focused on the 4 B's: Bats, Birds, Bees and Butterflies. Work is progressing on the introduction and maintenance of species monitoring schemes, as well as ongoing practical delivery to support important habitats. Following the purchase of a bat detector in 2023, this year we commissioned an ecologist report to analyse the findings and offer guidance. The surveys confirmed the presence of at least 12 species of bat within the National Park.

CASE STUDY: SPECIES RECOVERY IN THE SOUTH DOWNS

BUTTERFLIES

Since 2020, Neil Hulme, a freelance ecologist, conservationist and wildlife guide with a particular passion for butterflies has been completing annual butterfly surveys at 27 sites being restored or maintained by the South Downs National Park Authority and its partners.

Butterflies are highly sensitive to changes in habitat and climate, making them vital indicators of environmental health. When butterflies are found in abundance and variety, it often suggests that the local wildlife is thriving. Adverse weather needs to be considered when using butterflies as indicators of habitat health and weather patterns over winter 2023/24 and spring/summer 2024 had a negative impact on butterfly abundance. Overall, 2024 proved to be a poor year for butterflies but despite this, some sites showed remarkable improvements due to long-term habitat management.

Over the past 15 years, numerous chalk grassland sites have been significantly improved through the efforts of SDNPA working in collaboration with partners, volunteers and local conservation groups. The survey data underscores the importance of continued habitat restoration and monitoring to support butterfly populations and biodiversity.

Significant survey findings this year include:

- **5,923** butterflies of **36** species counted across **27** sites across the National Park.
- Presence of rare species like the hornet robberfly and cistus forester.
- Highest count to date of the Duke of Burgundy to date and regular counts for Adonis blue and chalk hill blue.
- Successful reintroduction of the pearl-bordered fritillary at Clapham Wood.



Pearl bordered fritillary © Neil Hulme

CASE STUDY: NATTERJACK TOADS

Natterjack toads were once widespread across the heaths of southern England, but habitat loss and climate change had reduced their range to a single site at Woolmer Forest in Hampshire. They are considered locally extinct in Sussex. Their distinctive rasping call can be heard up to a mile away, earning them the reputation as the UK's loudest amphibian. Over the past century 75 per cent of breeding sites for natterjack toads have disappeared in Great Britain. They are now almost exclusively confined to coastal sand dune systems and grazing marshes in north-west England and the Solway Firth in Scotland. A reintroduction programme started at Blackmoor in 2021 and the latest 2024/25 survey has recorded breeding natterjacks, with 28 toadlets counted. It's the first time that natterjack toads have been recorded breeding at Blackmoor in 50 years and represents a significant increase in their territory.

The comeback has been made possible by nature recovery work at Blackmoor, led by the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) and supported by Natural England and partners including the South Downs National Park Authority-led Heathland projects, ranger initiatives and S106 funding. Over the past decade shallow ponds have been created and heathland has been restored through the introduction of cattle grazing, producing perfect conditions for natterjacks to return.



Toadally awesome natterjacks bounce back in South Downs National Park



CASE STUDY: RIVER MEON AND THE RETURN OF THE WATER VOLE

Water voles are making a remarkable comeback in the South Downs National Park with a detailed ecological report showing that they are thriving and busily breeding on the river Meon in Hampshire. The scientific survey comes just over a decade after a local reintroduction programme of the water vole, which remains the country's fastest declining mammal species, losing 95 per cent of its range over the past 100 years. The biggest reasons for the decline have been habitat loss and predation by the non-native American mink. Water voles are important to a river habitat as they provide a good meal for predators like otters, herons and marsh harrier. Thanks to the water vole re-introduction, the otter has returned to the River Meon, with evidence there may be three breeding females on the river. The Meon Valley Partnership formed in 2008 and has worked with landowners to restore natural features of the river, re-introduce water voles, control American mink populations, and improve water quality. For the full story visit:



Ratty's remarkable return to the South Downs! – South Downs National Park Authority



CASE STUDY: CHALK GRASSLAND ASSESSMENTS

Over the last two years we have been carrying out Rapid Condition Assessments on our undesignated chalk grassland.

The sites are chosen by the ranger teams and a survey form created by the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre in 2012 has been updated to current species recommendations and checked by a Natural England expert. Rangers make contact with the landowners to obtain permission, and the surveys take place over the summer.

All landowners will get a short survey report, which includes a species list and some management recommendations. We have surveyed a total of 42 sites with 26 this year and 16 in 2023/24, with the ambition to increase the number annually as rangers become more confident in completing them. This work enables us to make assessments on the management, or lack of management, on the sites and work with the farmers and land managers about how we can improve the chalk grassland condition.

Chalk downlands hold some of the rarest habitats in the UK, the result of forest clearing as far back as Neolithic and Bronze Age times.

Since World War II, the country has lost around 80 per cent of grasslands. In the South Downs they now cover just 4 per cent of the National Park's area. Over one-third of the sites are less than one hectare in size.

The assessments and subsequent guidance, will help to preserve and maintain this crucial, rare habitat.



CASE STUDY: BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN (BNG) DELIVERED THROUGH PLANNING

BNG became mandatory under the Environment Act 2021 for major developments on 12 February 2024, requiring at least 10% improvement in biodiversity, demonstrated through DEFRA's Statutory Metric, and maintained for 30 years.

During the 2023/24 reporting period (SDNPA report on this metric one year in arrears), 18 applications (14.3%) utilised the BNG Metric, showing a **50% increase compared to the previous year**, reflecting the increasing use of the Metric in the industry in anticipation of mandatory BNG.

BNG levels **achieved consistently above the 10% requirement**. The types of applications using the Metric during this reporting period were generally larger or more complex sites with ecologists already involved in the project, while smaller-scale developments within the National Park often opted for general biodiversity enhancements instead.

Examples of enhancements most typically provided were wildflower planting, grassland management and tree and hedgerow planting and enhancements. Species-specific measures such as provision of bird, hedgehog and bat boxes were often secured via planning condition, sometimes referenced as contributing to BNG. Whilst these are important biodiversity enhancements, these are not within the scope of BNG as defined in the BNG Metric, which uses habitats as a biodiversity proxy.



BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

HABITAT

33.5%
(Target 10%)



... more habitat delivered through development (Target 10%)

HEDGEROW

65.9%



... increase on existing hedgerow delivered through development (length and quality)

CASE STUDY: NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS

The land-based sector of the South Downs is under immense financial pressure. At the heart of the SDNPA's nature recovery work, is the understanding that environmental objectives can only be realised through the landowners, farmers and land-managers of the South Downs National Park.

Almost all the land under their custodianship (70%+ of the SDNP) must be financially sustainable to achieve societal benefits. The SDNPA's Nature-based Solutions (NbS) work encourages land-use change for nature on un-economically viable farmland as a way of diversifying income generation streams. However, it is also crucial we look to retain agricultural practices on good quality farmland recognising the importance of food production.

Food production and nature recovery are not mutually exclusive for businesses in the SDNP, the land-based sector is crucial for the long-term prospects of the South Downs rural economy.

The NbS work sees officers from across all three directorates of the SDNPA working in harmony to deliver land-use change on privately owned land for nature and climate, supporting landowners to monetise natural capital on their land to ensure their land-based business can thrive and prosper

What has been achieved this year:

The Yr 2024/25 has been a progressive one for the South Downs National Park Authority's (SDNPA) NbS work:

- The year started with the hosting of a Green Finance summit "Pioneering the Future: Making Private Finance Work for Nature and Landowners" (23 May) on ways to accelerate nature recovery through green finance. The summit was attended by over 130 delegates from across the UK.
- Funding was successfully secured through the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund (NEIRF). This has allowed the SDNPA to accelerate the development of the new nature markets, specifically pioneering Voluntary Biodiversity Credits (VBCs), to increase the funnelling of private finance into nature recovery. The first of its kind in the UK to align with the DEFRA framework. **First National Park to announce major green finance scheme for business sector to accelerate nature recovery – South Downs National Park Authority**
- SDNPA Members endorsed NbS at the NPA (17 October) embedding this work within the organisation's structures.

- Through their statutory powers as a Local Planning Authority (LPA) the SDNPA has secured land use change for nature through entering into legal agreements with landowners.
- The SDNPA has worked closely with National Park Partnership to knowledge share their Nature based Solutions work by training other UK National Parks and National Landscapes at two workshop sessions

Impact:

By the end of this financial year, through this work, we will have seen a total of 1,636.76 ha of land devoted for nature to date, funded by an estimated £8 million of private finance. There is also a pipeline of approximately 4,688 ha recorded by landowners as land ear-marked for nature in the future.

Highlights of the year include:

1. the securing of a second parcel of land at Iford Estate of over 18ha which secures both BNG and VBCs in a first of its kind s106 legal agreement that was validated by Natural England.
2. the creation of England's largest BNG Scheme at Halnaker Hill Farm which sees over 130 ha of intensive farmland devoted to nature.
3. The piloting of a bespoke nutrient mitigation scheme aimed at unlocking housing and improving water quality in the River Itchen SAC catchment.



2. CLIMATE ACTION

HLT4 – SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY TO REDUCE ITS CARBON FOOTPRINT BY 150 TONNES PER ANNUM IN LINE WITH THE 2030 NET ZERO TARGET

KPI	Year	KPI Target (yrs 4-5)	SDNPA (Tonnes CO ₂)	Change on previous year (Tonnes)	RAG Status
Total annual SDNPA carbon emissions	2024/25	-150 tonnes (CO ₂) on previous year	435.19	+156.98	●
	2023/24		278.21	-4.8	
	2022/23		283.01	+16.44	
	2021/22	Original Baseline (not including work at SSCP)	266.57		

This year, SDNPA has changed the way it is reporting on carbon emissions by increasing the range of external supply chain factors to be taken into account. Due to this change, as well as all buildings at Seven Sisters Country Park now being finished and fully operational, the total tonnes of CO₂e reported have increased from 278.21 in 2024/25 to 435.19 in 2024/25. This is not a like for like comparison.

SDNPA have commissioned Small World Consulting Ltd to carry out an upstream emissions assessment using purchase data and physical consumption data for 2024/25. From this data they will be able to advise of any areas where quality of data could be improved and key hotspots for carbon management and a new baseline can be established.

2024/25 saw an update to the SDNPA vehicle fleet with the delivery of the new, all electric, lease vehicle. Data from this year has shown that Business Mileage has decreased by nearly 3000 miles while SDNPA fleet usage has increased by nearly 4000 miles with most of these miles being travelled in the new pool cars. This demonstrates the SDNPA's commitment towards achieving more sustainable business journeys.

Work to replace the external insulation and render to part of the South Downs Centre was also completed this year and it is hoped that this will reduce heating bills over the winter months.



HLT 5: 5% REDUCTION PER ANNUM IN THE OVERALL CARBON FOOTPRINT OF THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK FROM THE BASELINE REPORTED IN 2019

KPI	Annual 2024/25 Target*	Actual achieved 2024/25*	RAG Status
Total annual reduction in Co2 reported year on year in annual LULUCF Forestry component data in tons	5 tonnes	Due July 2025	TBC

INTRODUCTION

The annual greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory data is due in July 2025. We will be using this to update the carbon tracker we developed to monitor progress towards our emission reduction targets. There is a data lag in reporting against this measure as the data is only issued on an annual basis.

To improve our CO₂ reporting, SDNPA have commissioned Small World Consulting to look at Estate and Landscape level projects where BNG and Voluntary Biodiversity Credits have been secured. This will enable us to develop a methodology that can be used to calculate how much carbon these nature-based projects are likely to deliver in terms of their Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) component.

The work was commissioned in March 2025, and after some site specific trials, we will look to use this across all of the significant projects across the Park. This will mean our ability to report on this KPI will improve and in the longer term we can address the challenge of reporting effectively at intervals of less than a year.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Here are some of the achievements SDNPA have made through our Climate Change Programme this year, delivered through SDNPA directly and community-based projects that we support:

- 27 staff have completed Carbon Literacy training with a further 18 colleagues booked in. The organisation has committed to becoming a Silver level Carbon Literate Organisation.
- Over 200 people have taken part in Future Energy Landscape workshops across 10 parishes in Hampshire
- Over 4,000 children from 16 primary and secondary schools learnt about climate change through PeCAN's climate conference workshops
- 78 Members, 484 visits and 219 contributions to new Knowledge Hub Network for Community Climate Action in first 6 months
- 31 community groups taking action against climate change are listed on the SDNPA Climate Action Map
- 17 communities and parish councils supported by WeCAN to tackle climate change in Winchester district.



CASE STUDY: FUTURE ENERGY LANDSCAPE WORKSHOPS

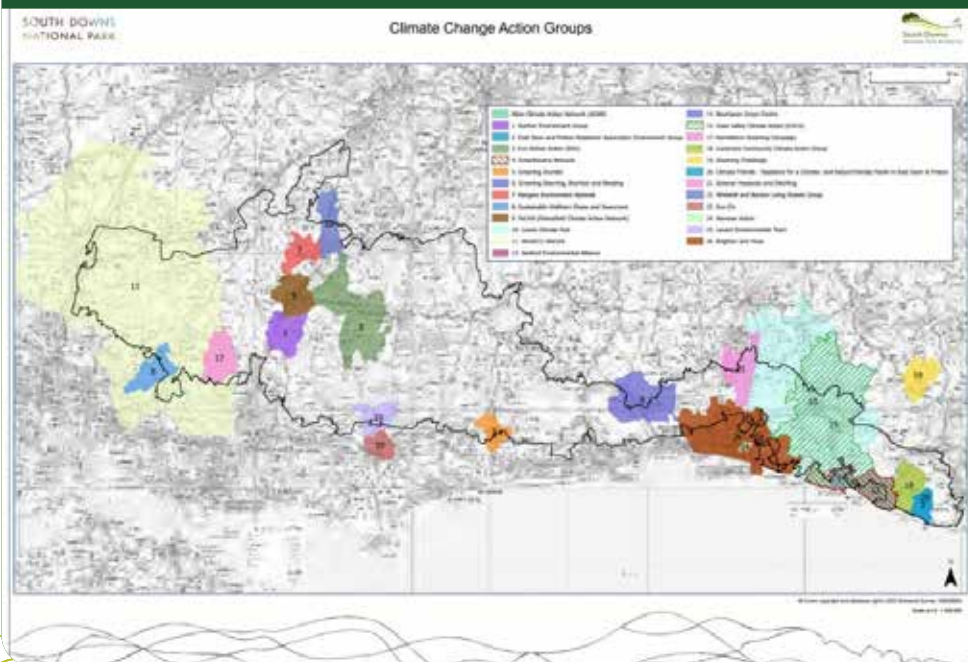
Over 200 people have taken part in Future Energy Landscape workshops across 10 parishes in Hampshire. These workshops put communities at the centre of the conversation about how renewable technologies can support us all decarbonise our energy system away from fossil fuels.

We have funded a community energy co-operative, Energise South Downs, to deliver these workshops which help people understand the energy demand in their local area and provides an opportunity for people to have an informed discussion about the benefits of localised, renewable energy provision. By understanding the various trade-offs of different renewables, attendees at these workshops were able to consider what a realistic mix of renewable technologies might be and discuss what would be appropriate and acceptable to local people and their landscape. Meeting the governments net zero strategy targets requires a big change to electrify how we travel and heat our homes and businesses. However, it is important that the increased demand for electricity comes from renewable sources, and it is important that communities are involved in understanding what this means for their local area. "The workshop made me believe our Parish could do something that before I thought was impossible. It is vital we discuss these issues as a community because it seems that change will happen at grass roots level."



The SDNPA is actively backing local Climate Action Networks and environmental groups. We've launched an online knowledge-sharing network and a map to connect these community climate initiatives. In response to requests for resource sharing and inter-group connection, we established the **South Downs Climate Action Network on Knowledge Hub** in October 2024. This online platform facilitates the exchange of case studies, useful links, and resources, helping communities implement local activities. Groups can also seek peer support and share lessons learned. In its first six months, the network has attracted 75 members, recorded 484 visits, and received 219 contributions. Shared topics include guides for setting up a "Library of Things" and "Repair Café," "Home Retrofit Knowledge Sharing," and a "Community Growing Toolkit." It also provides funding opportunities and a space to share events.

Alongside the Knowledge Hub Network, our **Climate Action Map** helps residents to find out how they can join others in their community to and take action to tackle climate change, knowing that they are part of a larger network committed to making change happen at a local level. Find out more on our **Climate Action Hub** pages.



3. A NATIONAL PARK FOR ALL

HLT6: INCREASE DIVERSITY OF THOSE ENGAGING WITH THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

KPI	Annual 2024/25 Target	Actual achieved 2024/25	RAG Status
H6.1 Number of people from under-represented groups engaged through our engagement and project activity	100	7,001	●
H6.2 Number of engagement activities targeted at underrepresented audiences	30	317	●

KPI	Annual 2024/25 Target	Actual achieved 2024/25	RAG Status
H7.1 Number of sessions facilitated by mobility equipment	100 per year	137	●
H7.2 Metres of new and/or improved accessible path	N/A	7,545	●
H7.3 Number of visits to the digital Accessibility Hub	5,000	8,069	●
H7.4 Number of page views of the Seven Sisters Country Park Accessibility Guide	N/A	4,789	●

KPI	Annual 2024/25 Target	Actual achieved 2024/25	RAG Status
HLT8: Digitally engage 100,000 people per year with the SDNP	100,000 people	154,704	●

COMMUNICATIONS

SOCIAL MEDIA REACH

97,774 ↗ 19%

Total followers



VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

11.7m ↗ 139%

Content Reach



30% ↗

Youtube subscribers



111k ↗ 56%

Video views

OUTREACH AND VOLUNTEERING



210

VOLUNTEER RANGERS SPENT

1,754

...days supporting National Park work

13,852

...hours of micro-volunteering through iNaturalist in the SDNP

EDUCATION

24 **YOUTH ACTION DAYS**
↗ 14%

...engaging **147 (+12%)** young people in positive environmental action



EDUCATION

6,816

↗ 71%

...school children from our more economically disadvantaged communities visited the National Park thanks to our Outdoor Learning Grant



INTRODUCTION

We want everyone to be able to access, experience and enjoy our special National Park. Our priorities are designed to promote, inform and engage people with the Park, especially audiences that are under-served: 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, and people facing socio-economic barriers to inclusion.

This year, we have exceeded all of our engagement targets, in some cases significantly underestimating the true potential of our networks and growing reach of our event programmes. These results highlight the increasing impact of our work and the appetite for meaningful connection with the National Park.

In response, our engagement targets will be revised and made more ambitious to better reflect the scale of opportunity for the year ahead.

ACHIEVEMENTS

A significant highlight of the year has been the success of the Outdoor Learning Grant, administered and funded by SDNPA with additional funding from the South Downs Trust. Designed to help connect pupils and staff with the National Park through nature-based and real-world learning experiences, the grant supports school children from all state-funded schools and colleges with 10% or more pupils eligible for Free School Meals,

Young people have continued to engage with the National Park through our South Downs Youth Action programme which gives young people aged 16-25 opportunities to gain new skills, meet people in the conservation sector and take positive action for the South Downs.

Some other key achievements and successful initiatives that we have delivered or supported this year include:

- South Downs Way: 18 new way markers, 22 gates repaired and 11 replaced along the South Downs Way.
- Ambassador Schools: Moulsecoomb Primary School, Brighton, became the first "Ambassador School" in an urban setting for the South Downs National Park, providing

a hub for schools from the city and beyond to access learning opportunities about the landscape, heritage and wildlife of the South Downs.

- Timescape project: **Timescape** was honoured to be nominated for 2 awards in 2024 – The Royal Society for Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Awards & National Park Protector, New Perspectives Awards.
- 15th Anniversary ReNature Grants: 21 grants of up to £1,000 for state-funded schools near the National Park.
- Green Careers: Over 600 young people attended career engagement events and workshops delivered by SDNPA over the course of the year.
- Dark Night Skies Festival: Over 2,000 attendees across multiple events including a new site for this year at Alice Holt.
- Young Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers: Regular walks and nature connected activities throughout the year across the National Park.
- **Muslim Hikers**: 160 participants celebrated National Walking Month at Queen Elizabeth Country Park.
- **Henry on Tour**: 281 attendees at Petworth; 38% under 24 years old.
- **Heathland Reunited SAMM Team**: Engaged over 440 people through bug hunts and guided walks as part of two bug day events at Hogmoor enclosure.
- Secrets of the Heath event: 2,250 visitors from Bordon area celebrated local heritage and wildlife.

CASE STUDY: EARLY HELP FOR FAMILIES

South Downs National Park have been working closely with young families in East Sussex for 18 months.

This work takes place in the school holidays where young people; their carers, loved ones and support workers come to Seven Sisters Country Park and we all spend the day together. During the morning we learn about SDNPA through a gentle ID walk/quiz, followed by a picnic either in the woods or in the Pump Barn and play nature-based games, build dens and remember what it is like to be a child again. We spend time chatting, making friends, playing and laughing. It is so much fun.

We offer these sessions to different families each time with spaces for up to 20 people. For some families it has been transformational and introduced them to an accessible place to return to with friends and family.

'To see the children all playing together was brilliant.'

'[I enjoyed most]...meeting new friends. I liked going to a new area (been back with mum and sister since. Walked along the Cuckmere and down to the beach).'

'[I enjoyed most]...All of it! A really nice walk with some nice facts thrown in, lovely picnic area in the woods, and seeing the kids playing together at the end was the icing on the cake!'

'Thank you for a great day. It was a great success!'



CASE STUDY: GENERATION GREEN 2: A NIGHT UNDER THE STARS

One of the key ambitions in the Landscapes Review was a night under the stars in a national landscape for every child.

Generation Green 2 enabled us to continue to support this ambition, with 120 young people from 5 groups experiencing the wonders of the Downs at night thanks to this funding.

Young people aged 7–18 from two secondary schools (BACA, Brighton and Seahaven Academy, Newhaven), two primary schools (Hertford Juniors, Brighton and Castle View Primary Academy, Portsmouth) and a Muslim Youth group were all able to experience first-hand the joys of walking under starry skies, observing planets and constellations through giant telescopes and exploring the nocturnal wildlife that thrives in these dark night skies.

Connecting to the South Downs in such a different and exciting way was truly magical. The young people left with a sense of awe and wonder, and a greater understanding of how the importance of protecting the South Downs day and night!



CASE STUDY: EXPLORERS OF THE SOUTH DOWNS

The programme offers a range of fun activities across the entire South Downs, allowing young people from disadvantaged areas with high levels of pupil premium funding and/or special educational needs (SEND) to explore the nature, history and culture of the South Downs National Park (SDNP).

The sessions provided a fun and memorable learning experience where young people gained a better understanding of the South Downs National Park but also highlighted the need to appreciate our green spaces and children left with a better understanding of the threats that the National Park faces and how they can help to protect it for the future.

Activities were varied and included introductory talks about the SDNP, natural printing and weaving, ancient skills and music, sensory walks, bug hunting, poem writing, den building, natural art, guided walks, nature connection sessions, storytelling, willow weaving, hapa zome (leaf printing), chalk carving, Saxon artefact exploration, beachcombing, river dipping and campfire cooking.

Explorers is supporting those schools and young people that are less likely to visit the SDNP without additional support. This year the programme enabled 1,430 young people from 40 school groups to participate. Over 23% of these young people had special needs, and in one school alone over 50% identified as global majority communities. On average over 43% of pupils were accessing Free School Meals.

Feedback from school staff and pupils continues to be excellent and demonstrates the impact that these experiences have on the lives of young people:

"Lots of children enjoyed seeing a variety of different animals, insects and birds. One child mentioned how 'he liked just being outside'. Although it is right on our doorstep, the majority of the children had never been walking in the South Downs". (Harbour Community Primary School).



4. LANDSCAPE & CULTURAL HERITAGE

INTRODUCTION

The South Downs National Park is a living, working and ever-changing landscape, shaped by its underlying geology and its human history.

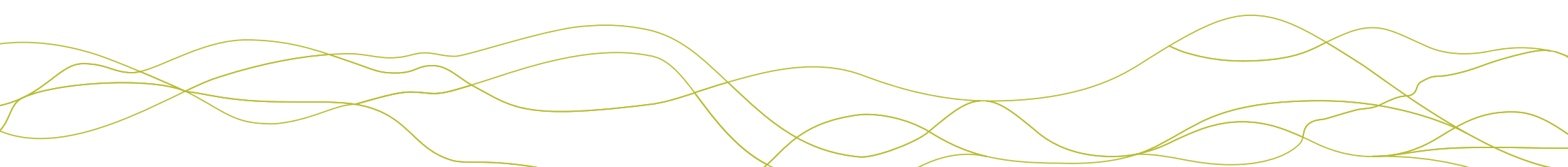
Over the past year, the South Downs National Park Authority has delivered and supported projects that celebrate the rich stories of this special landscape – working in harmony to protect and enhance its special qualities, and to create connection and relevance. We also recognise the interconnection between nature and heritage and the co-benefits they deliver, such as where heritage protections are also providing havens for nature.

The Protected Landscape Targets and Outcome Framework released early this year acknowledged that Protected Landscapes have a 'distinctive sense of place and represent our shared heritage and national identity'. The targets recognise the significant role that nationally designated heritage assets play in contributing to the special qualities of Protected Landscapes.

Going further than a focus only on 'Heritage At Risk', we will look to work with key partners to improve the quality and frequency of condition data, whilst exploring the opportunities that advances in citizen science and new technologies can offer in recognition of resourcing challenges across the sector as a whole. Building future custodianship through increasing understanding is also imperative to protect these assets for future generations.



The Devil's Jumps, © Treyford SDNPA/Neil Hulme



CASE STUDY: FAIR GAME

In November, the Fair Game project was awarded the 2024 Council for British Archaeology (CBA) Archaeological Achievement Award in the Sustainability category. This prestigious award recognises excellence and best practice in archaeology across the UK and Ireland.

The project has been a collaborative initiative focused on sustainable deer management through the archaeological story of fallow deer. Originally introduced to Britain by the Romans (with the first evidence for their presence found at Fishbourne Roman Palace), fallow were a semi-domesticated and luxury animals free roaming a managed landscape. These Roman fallow deer died out before their reintroduction to Britain in around 1000AD, again as part of a managed cultural dynamic. It is a significant change in the deer/human relationship that has resulted in the current challenge of managing growing numbers of deer, and their contribution to declining woodland regeneration and ground nesting bird numbers. We now also see Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) subject to condition downgrading in part due to deer impacts. Using the archaeological and historical evidence for fallow deer over time, the project has sought to use the 'deep time' story of a species and our changing cultural relationship with it, to bring together a diverse partnership to inform and contribute to the sustainable management of this species today and into the future.

Led by the University of Exeter, and thanks to funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Fair Game has brought together the British Deer Society (BDS), National Trust, Natural England, Sussex Archaeological Society and the South Downs National Park Authority alongside deer managers, Forestry Commission, local businesses and food charities. Working closely with Natural England's PSS 'Sussex Woods' project, Fair Game has supported the distribution of 10 tonnes of venison through charities Fareshare and The Felix Project, who provide meals for people



facing food poverty; it has supported deer managers and suppliers to sell venison through new market opportunities; trained 7 young people in deer management through a BDS qualification pathway, created downloadable flyers and posters about deer management and its links to the environment, has delivered pop-ups to capture public opinions on deer management and venison, and an industry workshop at Michelham Priory. The project also recreated a medieval 'Unmaking', as featured in the *Book of St. Albans*, 1486, which detailed the method of medieval deer butchery for distribution across the community, ensuring wider social benefit.

For more information, take a look at the Fair Game project animation:



youtube.com/watch?v=nxI0n4S-XqE

CASE STUDY: HERITAGE SKILLS TASTER DAY

A pilot support scheme to provide young people with access to skills, training and employment.

"Prioritising young people facing barriers to opportunity and those working or training in mainstream construction roles, the Heritage Skills Taster Days offer building conservation training and future heritage careers." **Sussex Heritage Trust**

In 2024, Sussex Heritage Trust launched an innovative pilot, bringing together heritage craftspeople, businesses and colleges, to address the growing capacity gap in traditional heritage skills. These skills are essential to the conservation of our built heritage, and therefore a key ingredient in the character and experiential qualities of the South Downs landscape. Many of these skills have a role to play in Net Zero delivery, particularly around adaptation of heritage building stock. Businesses had been reporting a critical need for apprentices and placements – young people who could be trained in skills such as traditional carpentry, flint masonry, brickmaking, hurdle making etc. in order to enable both business continuity and meeting demand. One significant issue has been a lack of awareness among young people of heritage skills as viable, well paid career opportunities, and the routes into training and development schemes. The Sussex Heritage Trust not only sought to address that gap, but delivered a pipeline of career support.

Supported by funding from the Foyle Foundation, SDNPA and The South Downs Trust, the taster day welcomed 27 young people aged 16-25 to Weald and Downland Living Museum, to participate in a series of heritage craft tasters guided by experienced traditional craft practitioners. Young people were drawn from Chichester College Group with a proportion coming from areas facing notable barriers to accessing employment and training – 47% of participants came from areas with the highest levels of income deprivation and involuntary unemployment, and 68% came from areas with the lowest academic attainment and skills. The taster day was step one in a process of ongoing support delivered by Sussex Heritage Trust, matching young people to placement, bursary and further training opportunities. Training bursary support was also given to under-18s, who often face additional barriers through mainstream provision. In total, 11 young people out of 27 went on to further training. One participant has gone on to secure employment with Chichester Carpentry. The ripples of this pilot continue, with Sussex Heritage Trust providing ongoing support to the participants. We are building on this for 2025, with stronger ties to the



colleges and students as we are no longer selling an ambition but a tried and tested approach that can lead to employment. The evaluation captured from the pilot has formed the basis of a funding bid collaboratively developed by the Sussex Heritage Trust with support from partners including SDNPA, proposing a three-year programme to meet the needs of heritage conservation for the South Downs and wider landscape.

The pilot has demonstrated that a local approach bringing together business, education providers and heritage specialists delivers significant impact that can be life changing, by increasing confidence, opportunity, and supporting young people into the workforce.

5. VIBRANT, RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

SDNPA is in the top 10% of Local Planning Authorities in the country in terms of number of planning applications. Officers and members work to achieve multiple gains for the National Park from development proposals, using a landscape-led approach set out in our South Downs Design Guide and other Supplementary Planning Documents. Significant schemes this year included:

- 19 new dwellings at St Cuthmans School, Tote Lane, Stedham
- 35 new dwellings and commercial floorspace at the former Bus Station, Lewes
- 226 new dwellings at Old Malling Farm, Lewes
- 22 new dwellings at Land North of Hazeley Road, Twyford

The SDNPA's Community Infrastructure Levy raised over £1.8 million in the financial year. We gave out over £280k to town and parish councils to spend on their own projects and around £1m to groups for specific projects including approximately:

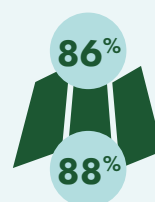
- £200k on Bury School (classroom extension)
- £130k on Egrets Way (Phase 6)
- £50k to Petersfield Open Air Swimming Pool (to upgrade changing rooms)
- £50k to HCC for their 'Hampshire pollinators project'
- £50k to Buriton for their village hall improvements

The SDNPA is also working to review its award-winning South Downs Local Plan, carrying out the first formal public consultation (Regulation 18) in January to March 2025, including publishing background evidence and regulatory assessments. It continues to support communities to produce their own planning documents, adopting the Bramshott and Liphook Neighbourhood Development Plan; the Selborne Village Design Statement; and the Sompting Conservation Area Management Plan. The 45 made Neighbourhood Development Plans, Village/Parish Design Statements and 41 Parish Priorities Statements also informed the development of the Local Plan Review.

As a minerals and waste authority, SDNPA adopted the East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan (Revised Policies Document), and agreed that the West Sussex Waste Local Plan was fit for purpose for a further five years. It also worked with partner Local Planning Authorities to finalise and submit the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan for examination, with hearings taking place in February 2025.

PLANNING

PLANNING APPLICATIONS



AFFORDABLE HOMES

...of completed homes given
planning permission in the
National Park



CIL FUNDING

£1.09m

...awarded to 38 projects to
improve community spaces



COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)

The SDNPA's Community Infrastructure Levy raised over £1.8 million in the financial year. We gave out over £280k to town and parish councils to spend on their own

projects and around £1m to groups for specific projects. Here are a couple of the projects supported over the last year.

CASE STUDY: DROXFORD JUNIOR SCHOOL LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

Droxford Junior School were awarded £37,563.85 in CIL funding for the schools landscape strategy for learning and play.

The projects aims were to provide new play and outdoor education facilities. The project has developed the boundaries of the school field and the site for learning and play. The funds have been spent on an outdoor classroom and amphitheatre, a new trim trail, low ropes and den building area, along with planting of pollinating plants.

Droxford Junior School is also an ambassador school for the South Downs National Park and they are instrumental in helping other schools engage with outdoor education by hosting a collaboration workshop which over 35 schools attended. This CIL funded project was also the main case study in the 2023 Bloomsbury published book 'The Sustainability and Climate Change Curriculum Outdoors'.



CASE STUDY: CHANGING PLACES TOILET – PETERSFIELD TOWN CENTRE

East Hampshire District Council were awarded £45,000 in CIL funds to deliver a new Changing Places Toilet in the centre of Petersfield.

The outcome of the project was that people with disabilities and their carers, families and friends will be able to visit Petersfield and the surrounding area either for shopping, meeting friends for a day out safe in the knowledge that there is a CPT nearby that meets their needs.

Since it has opened the Changing Places toilet has been well used. Please see the EHDC press release below with comments from Treloars students and carers about the difference the facility will make to their ability to visit Petersfield and the surrounding area.



Changing Places toilet opens | East Hampshire District Council



CASE STUDY: AWARD-WINNING DESIGN

The South Downs National Park Authority's commitment to high-quality, landscape-led planning and design has been recognised through several prestigious awards and commendations over the past year.

Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) Awards

The RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence South East were held in August with the Authority winning "Best Plan".

The accolade recognises the outstanding contribution made to the National Park's planning framework by the **Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document**.

Due to its success at regional level, the design guide was shortlisted for the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) National Awards in the 'Excellence in Plan Making Practice' category.

Although the national award ultimately went to Cornwall Council's Climate Emergency Development Plan Document, the shortlisting reflects the Design Guide's significant contribution to promoting well-designed development that respects and enhances the special qualities of the National Park.

Academy of Urbanism Awards

The town of Lewes was also named runner-up in the 2024 Academy of Urbanism Awards for the best town or small city in the UK. These awards celebrate places that demonstrate enduring quality, improvement, and excellence in urban design and placemaking.

Landscape Institute's Awards

The Stanmer Park Management Plan, developed by Land Use Consultants (LUC), won the Landscapes and Parks Management category at the Landscape Institute's annual awards.



The plan exemplifies a landscape-led approach, integrating historic design principles with contemporary priorities such as climate resilience, biodiversity, and community use. It supports the continued reinvigoration of Stanmer Park as a vital green space for both people and nature.

Watch the film below to find out more about landscape-led design in the South Downs National Park:

 youtu.be/TL25Qa7hiJI

6. ECONOMY

In 2021, the Farming In Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme was announced by Defra to help support farmers in England's 44 protected landscapes.

Farmers and land managers in the South Downs National Park have been able to apply for funding as part of the initiative to support nature-friendly farming and sustainability.

This year, over £1 million of funding was awarded to FiPL projects across the National Park. Collectively, the Year 4 projects have achieved against all four programme outcomes of Climate, Nature, People and Place.

Funding has supported initiatives such as (but not limited to) sustainable grazing, soil health improvements and efforts to reduce nutrient pollution to protect water quality. Efforts to preserve traditional skills have included rural craft classes and the re-thatching of historic buildings, with schools benefiting from educational visits. Conservation initiatives included tackling invasive species and creating habitats for wildlife, including lapwings.

Some of the projects that have been supported by the programme are featured below.

FARMING

FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES (FiPL)

37

...projects delivering for Climate, Nature, People and Place were awarded **£1,025,747**



LAND

2,357^{ha}



HEDGES
PLANTED

430^m

TREES
PLANTED

245



PONDS CREATED/
RESTORED

4



FARM CLUSTERS

172

...farmers in **5** farm clusters covering 2/3 of the NP



CASE STUDY: FIPL CHALK FARM, WILLINGDON

Chalk Farm, Willingdon, was awarded a grant of £20,350 towards the restoration of a historic flint stock yard and associated structures on Willingdon Hill.

The Eastbourne Downland is characterised as an area of wide open downs close to the sea, with extensive views. Historically used for grazing livestock, the area has/had a wealth of old flint structures, built to provide shelter and help with stock management. These agricultural flint walls and buildings (which are not suitable for diversification of use) are important cultural and historical features of the South Downs National Park. However, currently there are no financial mechanisms or incentives, beyond the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, for supporting farmers/landowners in their restoration. Consequently, many are falling into decline/disappearing.

The restoration work comprises four elements:

- Main flint compound/stock yard.
- Outbuilding
- Flint feeding troughs
- Flint well-head

All work will be carried out using lime mortar and appropriate reclaimed materials.



CASE STUDY: PAYTHORNE FARM, TRULEIGH HILL

Creation of a learning and engagement space Image

Paythorne Farm was awarded a grant of £95,914.50 towards the repurposing of a lean-to of an existing under-utilised barn, to create:

- a good sized learning space;
- a small meeting/consultation room;
- basic kitchen and toilet facilities (including accessible toilet and shower) and;

a hard-standing parking area and paddock area to support the use and associated activities of the learning space.

The re-purposed lean-to of the existing barn is ideally located to provide a physical focal point for a wide range of engagement and learning activities providing better understanding of the working countryside among younger under-represented audiences and promoting shared learning via farmer/land manager and agricultural sector related events.



CASE STUDY: SCF MAGNIFICENT MEADOWS

CPRE Hampshire, The Countryside Charity, applied to the Sustainable Communities Fund, managed by the South Downs National Park Trust in partnership with the South Downs National Park Authority, for funding towards their 'Magnificent Meadows' pilot project, aiming to bring life back to precious meadows and species-rich grasslands.

The project area stretches between St Catherine's Hill and Magdalen Hill Down on the edge of the South Downs National Park; the start of the South Downs Way passes over the M3 at this point. These project areas are recognised as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), home to rare and endangered plant species and unique animal habitats. Currently, these sites are fragmented habitats of chalk grassland already showing signs of hawthorn and scrub invasion. If neglected, these important habitats can become overgrown, losing their ecological value and the benefits they provide to both wildlife and people.

Meadows and chalk grasslands have been a vital part of the Hampshire landscape for thousands of years. They nurture wildflowers, offer ideal habitats for wildlife, and provide essential resources for pollinators, contributing significantly to biodiversity. In doing so they act as important stepping stones for wildlife, creating interconnected habitats that cumulatively cover large areas. They also play a crucial role in intercepting rainwater, which helps reduce flooding, and they mitigate the effects of heat waves by lowering temperatures. However, sadly we have lost over 97% of our species rich grasslands in England and Wales. The remaining 3% are vital homes for species such as the Duke of Burgundy butterfly and green woodpeckers.

This pilot project has been managed by CPRE and kindly supported by Highcliffe Community Forum for Action, Winchester City Council, Hampshire County Council, Butterfly Conservation, Highcliffe Allotments, The Friends of St Giles Hill, Emmaus, All Saints Primary School. The project received 50% of it's funding from the SCF fund – a contribution of £5,000. The project aims to:

- Resume chalk grassland management, in particular, cut and remove scrub.
- Establish land ownership and management responsibility for the fragments.
- Devise a management plan for the fragments, to safeguard chalk downland wildlife and community connection via hay making, smallholder grazing and coppicing.
- Explore sources of funding including obligations, e.g. M3 mitigation funds.



- Survey and map chalk grasslands in gardens to connect doorsteps to the downs.
- Run regular volunteer events to engage the local community in meadow management and hay making activities.
- Engage with local schools and develop practical educational resources around meadow making.

Follow the progress of the project and its achievements via the CPRE website:



cprehampshire.org.uk/news/magnificent-meadows/

ON THE GROUND

ON THE GROUND AND GRASSROOTS PROJECTS

Essential relationships are fostered and developed between the National Park Authority, Partners and local stakeholders. Together, numerous projects are initiated every year 'on the ground'. Here are just a few highlights from 2024/25:

SOUTH DOWNS WAY MAINTENANCE

Snaking its way along the very spine of the chalk, the South Downs Way is a 100-mile-long exhibition to one of the best natural galleries in the UK. Artwork by nature and Toil adorn its path in vistas stretching into the sea. It's a wonderful testament to the beauty of our landscape, and one which we're lucky enough to call ours. With this ownership, comes responsibility, however. Left with no management – time and flora would reclaim the path and make it untraversable. So, with the steady hands of our volunteers, and trusted tools, we keep this road open, for many more to discover its wonder.

In September, we completed a section of this work near Cocking. Overlooking West Sussex, the Volunteers (armed with Grass hooks) cut swathes into the bank vegetation, raking the material up and collecting it to be unloaded in a prepared deposit site. This is long but satisfying work. The volunteers were also in charge of sharpening their own equipment as the day went on and found great satisfaction in keeping their tools in fine fettle – if for no other reason, because it makes them far more effective!

The collection of this material is for ecological benefit too. The verges of the South Downs Way can be a haven for many species, and in places is ideally placed to be an example habitat, on view for all to see while they wend their way from Winchester to Eastbourne. So, by collecting this material that has been cut, our volunteers allow this site to attempt to return to the chalk grassland we so desperately need in our National Park. Cumulatively, over the past two centuries we have lost more than 80% of the chalk grassland in the UK., so, the ribbons that adorn the edges of the South Downs Way may well make all the difference. And sometimes, just making sure that people can access our landscape, is all the difference we can ask for.

Ethan Purdy, SDNPA Assistant Ranger



© SDNPA

MAKING THE MOST OF FIELD MARGINS

The SDNPA Western Team rangers supported a farmer near Chalton, only a stone throw from Butser Hill Ancient farm, to create a crucial habitat – a dew pond, historically being dug by farmers as a watering hole for livestock with some in the National Park dating back several hundred years. These pretty ponds are also havens for all manner of species – supporting around 70 per cent of all freshwater species found in lowland landscapes in the UK.

For creating this particular pond, we decided to adopt a more traditional method, used by generations past but with a modern twist. The pond was located within an arable field boundary margin, which was very limited in terms of biodiversity. Once the footprint was dug out, the chalk subbase was compacted using an excavator, followed by a 'sandwich' of bentonite clay powder, some straw to insulate, another layer of chalk sub soil, followed lastly by a layer of lime. This method was decided upon after lots of research about historical ponds of days gone by.

After three days of hard work, water could be added to help stabilise the 'dry' contents to prevent them slipping away. Going forward, rainfall will fill the pond naturally after creating

some channels and inlets designed to capture sediment and nutrients. Finally, some chalk wildflower seed was sown to stabilise the pond surround and hey presto – job done!

The farmer and his family were thrilled to have the opportunity to fit the pond into a rather awkward unused margin, creating a wonderful habitat that hopefully will thrive for years to come. The farm has hosted Turtle Doves in the past few years, so we do hope that this will aid their recovery being an essential part of their desired habitat.

Paul Bushell, SDNPA Ranger



BRINGING BEAVERS BACK TO THE MEON VALLEY

Back in November 2023, SDNPA Western rangers visited a landowner to discuss repairing a leaky sluice gate on a tributary of the River Meon. Over the past 15 years, the gate had undergone a series of makeshift repairs, and we were looking for a more sustainable solution that would not only restore functionality but also enhance the biodiversity of the riparian corridor. After lengthy discussions, with not much progress, someone half-jokingly suggested that beavers might solve the problem. This offhand comment quickly gained traction, and within weeks, renowned beaver expert Derek Gow was on-site, assessing the habitat's suitability for a beaver reintroduction project.

Beavers are considered a keystone species. This means their impact on the ecosystem is disproportionately large compared to their size or abundance. Beavers help to create and maintain wetland habitats, improve water quality, sequester carbon, and potentially aid in flood control by slowing the flow of water. The habitat they create supports a wide range of species, enhancing overall biodiversity.

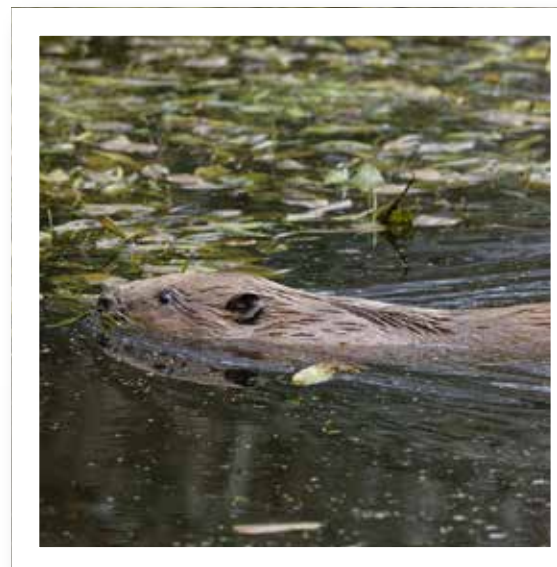
We began exploring the possibility of assisting the landowner with a FiPL funding application and sought to engage the local community through a public consultation process. After working with an external consultancy and preparing material in house, we attended a local fair, the Parish Council's Annual General Meeting, and held a drop-in event. The response was overwhelmingly positive—over 120 survey responses, with 97.4% of participants expressing support for the project.

By November 2024, we had secured all necessary licences and funding, and the fence to enclose the beavers was in place. But this was no ordinary fence. Designed with a specific

purpose in mind, it features an anti-climb curve at the top and a skirt extending at least 50cm along the ground to prevent burrowing. In addition to the standard species surveys conducted by our team, we secured additional funding through FiPL and ReNature to carry out additional surveys. Southampton University's Geography & Environment Department, having heard about the project, offered to contribute further by conducting surveys of their own to further bolster the project. These surveys, alongside our own will provide us with a baseline before the beavers go in, and we can then look at how beavers will effect this wetland over time.

This project is not only about finding a solution to the dysfunctional sluice gate, but about creating a lasting, sustainable solution that benefits both the landowner and the local ecosystem. It's a testament to the power of collaboration and innovation in addressing environmental challenges.

Jake Barnes, SDNPA Ranger



HELPING TO PRESERVE SCHEDULED MONUMENTS AT DEVIL'S DYKE, A FORMER VICTORIAN PLAYGROUND

Devil's Dyke hillfort near Poynings, West Sussex, is a **Scheduled Monument**. This means it is deemed archaeologically important enough to warrant protection and conservation. Originally, this hillfort (comprising of a high bank and surrounding ditch) would have stood 6m above the base of the outer ditch, which itself is 2 metres deep. It would have stood out as an impressive beacon, across the landscape – void of any vegetation – bright white, bare chalk, intimidating visitors. The original entrance is still used, in fact, it's now a road that takes you up to a pub and car park. In the Victorian times, this site became a tourist attraction, with fairgrounds, bandstands, a funicular railway (still visible from the north) and a cable car that went across Devil's Dyke itself. The site was accessed by a railway that ran from Aldrington to the Dyke Railway Station located at Dyke Farm.

The South Downs National Park Authority Eastern Ranger Team has been working on this monument for a number of years. Initially this started with managing the contract under the farmers Higher Level Stewardship agreement, to clear the site of dense gorse that was engulfing the monument and allowing cover for burrowing rabbits. Once cleared, this didn't mean the job was done. Gorse is notoriously difficult to manage. It's incredibly resilient and will return if left unchecked. Every two years the patch Rangers and volunteers come back, tools in hand, to cut it down again. The canopy cover of the gorse has been reduced to a point that it allows for other vegetation, grass and some chalk grassland species, to colonise the areas of bare ground that were left from the original clearance. This means we're winning! Due to its archaeological importance, bonfires are not permitted, so we have to drag the gorse down the slope, into the ditch and back up into the field for the farmer to dispose of. This keeps everyone warm on frosty winter days!

Phillippa Morrison-Price, SDNPA Lead Ranger



DARK NIGHT SKIES FESTIVAL 2025

The South Downs National Park Authority's Dark Skies Festival held 5 in-person events over eleven days in February, encompassing half-term across all three National Park counties.

This year's theme encouraged people to "Embrace the Darkness" with a focus on "Glimmers", to inspire a sense of wonder and awe; celebrating the sparkling lights of the stars, planets, meteors and moon in the night sky, the flashes of encounters with nocturnal wildlife, the bioluminescence of glowworms and biofluorescence of other life.

To accompany the Festival, the SDNPA launched their Astrophotography competition in November. Winning shots were shown on each morning of the Festival with printouts used to produce a mobile astrophotography exhibition which was exhibited at several of the events.

A new 'Embrace the Darkness' podcast was also launched during the Festival, focusing on different people's experiences of the night sky. The first season had 6 episodes with one episode produced from audio recorded at our event at Brighton Seafront.

'Walk the Planets' and 'Star Party' events were held at Seven Sisters Country Park, Alice Holt and Queen Elizabeth Country Park. These offered a variety of hands-on and informative activities offering opportunities for star-gazing, night walks, story-telling, meteorite displays, meet the owls and craft activities amongst others.



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Portsmouth Historic Dockyard held their own Stargazing event on 5 February which we attended. Over 600 people came to the event on a clear(ish) night, which helped for viewing celestial objects through the telescope. Our Events Van offered visitors an opportunity to try out our special VR headset night sky experiences.

Elinor Newman, Events and Engagement Assistant
(**'Queen of Darkness'**)

SECRETS OF THE HEATH

The Secrets of the Heath event was held at Hogmoor Inclosure, Bordon in June 2024. A two-day celebration organised by the South Downs National Park and local partner groups, this free event is provided for the local community and users of the surrounding heathlands sites. The event saw stalls and stands distributed around the site, each providing craft activities, bug hunting and heritage interpretation. There were several heritage reenactment groups who gave demonstrations throughout the two days and wildlife organisations running talks. The event provides a key engagement focus for the Heathlands Reunited project, but also provides a great opportunity to engage with a key audience about our wider SDNPA messaging on nature, people and place. Funded by the Heathlands reunited project, along with Whitehill and Bordon Community Trust and the Land Trust, approximately 3000 people attended over the weekend.

Olivia French,
SAMM Heathlands Project



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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 2024/25 the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) received a grant totalling around £10.7 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 2024/25 the SDNPA received income of just over **£3.4 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 2024/25 the SDNPA received **£2.8 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 2024/25 was **£16.9 million**.



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 4&5 Action Plan – 2023–25)**



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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