



SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY Corporate Plan 2025–26



South Downs National Park Authority

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Early orchid © Jen Fellows

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1. INTRODUCTION

The South Downs National Park covers over 1,600^{km2} of England's most valued lowland landscapes shaped, over millennia, by the people who have lived and worked here.

Its inspirational and varied landscapes, internationally important wildlife, rich cultural heritage, and vibrant market towns and villages hold a special place in the hearts of many millions. If we want it to remain a special place, we need to make sure that its landscapes are conserved and enhanced, provide benefits to all of society, and that people can enjoy, understand, and take action to support it.

Much is changing with national policy - on the environment in general and with respect to Protected Landscapes (National Parks and National Landscapes) since we first wrote our corporate plan. Defra is reviewing its Environmental Improvement Plan and has published further guidance on achieving 30 by 30. The Environment Bill includes commitments to statutory Net Biodiversity Gain through the Planning system and the creation of mandatory Local Nature Recovery Strategies for every part of England. In addition, we have seen the strengthening of the duty of public bodies to help improve National Parks, and intentions to strengthen National Park purposes and give Park Authorities more flexibility to undertake commercial activity. Alongside that we are seeing reform to the planning system that will

provide new challenges and opportunities. The entire system of support for farming is in transition as the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme replaces the old EU CAP (Common Agricultural Policy).

During 2025-26 the National Park Authority will be undertaking a review of the Partnership Management Plan. This will identify revised vision and outcomes and show how different partners will be taking action to help achieve them. The plan will be ready for public consultation in Summer 2025 and a new 5-year plan will be approved by the Authority in December 2025. It will inform the new corporate plan for 2026-31. To bridge the gap between now and 2026 this corporate plan will run for one year 2025-2026.

Despite this, I envisage that our objectives will remain broadly relevant, and we can expect the next iteration of the Corporate Plan to be an evolution rather than a dramatic change. Where we will see a difference will be in a shift in how we define our objectives to align more with national level targets

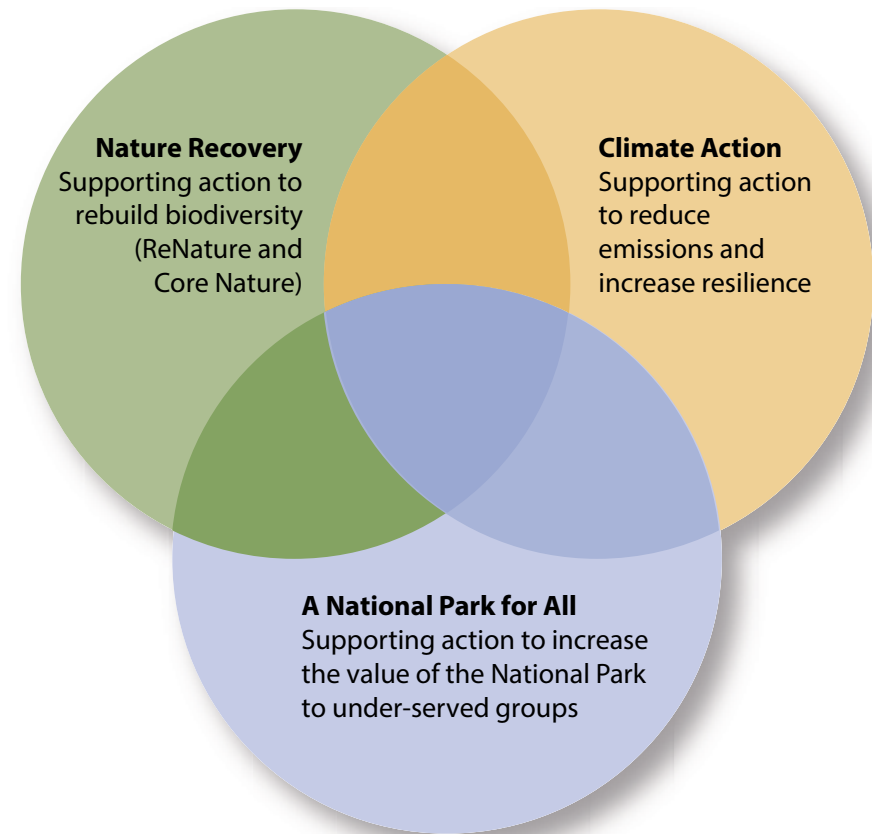
Siôn McGeever
Chief Executive Officer
South Downs National Park Authority



2. HIGH LEVEL TARGETS

The long-term ambitions of the **Partnership Management Plan (PMP)** and the Local Plan are very broad - it is therefore essential that we focus on those areas where we know we can make the most impact against the priorities in the PMP, the Public Affairs Strategy and Government's Glover response. This does not mean abandoning the entire range of the PMP. We will maintain the breadth of its ambition with the associated partnerships so that we can respond swiftly when circumstances change and/or funding is secured.

It is for this reason that we are putting in place a single set of high-level targets for this Corporate Plan. This is how we will continue to measure the overall effectiveness of the South Downs National Park Authority between 2025 and 2026 in terms of its impact on the ground. We will expect every team to maximise its contribution towards these targets.



KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

A series of Key Performance Indicators and targets have been developed to measure progress towards the High-Level Targets.

Core work and Project delivery by all parts of the organisation will not be itemised in the Corporate Plan but will contribute to the High-Level Targets and will be monitored against agreed delivery plans and be part of the overall figures we report.

These Key Performance Indicators and Targets are subject to change according to, but not limited to, Government directives such as the implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain, the Defra targets for Protected Landscape and Natural England species recovery targets.

The Key Performance Indicators have been developed according to what is currently measurable. Meanwhile significant work is taking place to develop baselines and improve systems to better evidence the impact of the South Downs National Park Authority's work towards Nature Recovery, Climate Action and A National Park for All. We will continue to develop qualitative measures of impact.

2.1 NATURE RECOVERY

Nationally and globally, nature is under intense pressure, with fresh evidence every week about declines in insect populations, farmland birds, soils, water and air quality, and the onset of new pests and diseases (such as ash dieback). All these trends are evident in the South Downs; however, there is also hope. Superb examples already exist across the National Park of action to manage and expand biodiversity, often by farmers, estates, businesses, and communities in addition to the dedicated work of environmental NGOs and Public Bodies. Awareness of the value of nature's intrinsic value soared during the pandemic, and restoring biodiversity will also bring social, health and wellbeing, and economic benefits as well as being key to tackling climate change.

The south east of England is a water stressed environment and the chalk aquifer of the South Downs is an essential resource for water supply. The condition of wetland habitats and rivers, including chalk streams, is also in poor condition. During 2025-26 we will continue to work in partnership to improve ecological status of our rivers and wetlands, protect the groundwater resource support a catchment-based approach.

Framed by the South Downs National Park Wildlife Delivery Plan and Campaign for Nature Recovery #ReNature, our goal is to have 33% of the South Downs National Park for nature and 67% to be nature friendly, in a connected and joined up network of habitats.

Nature Recovery = **ReNature + Core Nature**
 + Connecting people with nature

- **Core Nature** – the sites/initiatives which already have a primary objective for nature or managing biodiversity. For example, designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs), Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and ancient semi natural woodland. This is the 25% of land for nature from the 2020 baseline of best available data for habitat extent in the South Downs National Park.
- **ReNature** – the sites/initiatives where there is a significant change of land management whereby nature's recovery or managing for biodiversity becomes the/a primary objective. The uplift from 25% of land for nature to 33%.
- **Connecting people with nature** – ensuring that society benefits from nature – ecosystem products and services.



NATURE RECOVERY: EVIDENCING SUCCESS

It is important to note that nature will not be “recovered” instantly. These key performance indicators evidence that nature recovery action has been taken and will, in time, lead to Nature Recovery through improved habitat condition, species abundance and biodiversity.

	High Level Target	Key Performance Indicator	Years 4-5 target
HLT1	To secure an additional 13,000ha, or 33% of land managed for nature by 2030 from a baseline of 25%	H1.1 Total hectares of habitat created H1.2 Total hectares of habitat improved for nature H1.3 Total hectares legally secured via the ReNature H1.4 Total hectares land put forward for future nature recovery	H1.1/1.2/1.3/1.4 1,300 hectares – This is a cumulative target over 10 years towards 13,000ha
HLT2	Work to maintain, enhance and/or restore 30% of existing Core Nature sites and support key species recovery within the SDNP by 2030	H2.1 Total extent of Core Nature sites where SDNPA activity is contributing towards favourable condition H2.2 Number of species recovery programmes developed for delivery from 2023	H2.1. H2.1 To be reported using case studies highlighting number of sites assessed for condition and the condition of those sites H2.2 To be reported using case studies for 2025-26
HLT3	To prepare for and implement Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)	H3.1 Relevant applications to achieve at least a 10% BNG increase from the pre-development biodiversity value. [Additional indicators from BNG regulations are likely to be implemented in once delivery commences]	H3.1 At least 10% BNG increase from the pre-development biodiversity value

2.2 CLIMATE ACTION

Climate Change is one of the principal drivers of environmental change for the South Downs National Park. Its impacts are likely to be significant and profound across a whole range of areas and assets.

The South Downs National Park Authority has a key role in meeting the challenges arising from the climate and nature emergency in terms of advocacy, influence and delivery. Climate change is having a fundamental effect on biodiversity, agriculture, water resources and communities in the South Downs National Park. We are already experiencing more unpredictable weather events causing drought, soil erosion and flooding.

Action to reduce emissions and react to existing climate change will help to make South Downs communities and businesses more resilient, bring people together with a shared purpose, and stimulate jobs and economic activity. Reducing land-based emissions and scaling up on the ability of both agricultural land and habitats to sequester more carbon will be crucial for addressing both the climate and nature recovery crisis. We will also act as an exemplar by demonstrating best practice in our corporate response to climate change. We want to be recognised as a leading player in managing the impacts of climate change on the South Downs National Park and contributing to a low carbon economy. The delivery of technical and nature-based solutions, to draw down and sequester greater amounts of carbon will be the main mechanism that will get us to our Net-Zero target.



CLIMATE ACTION: EVIDENCING SUCCESS

Work to develop a habitat carbon inventory of the South Downs National Park is underway. This resource will provide a baseline for carbon sequestration across the National Park and ensure that Nature Recovery is viewed through a carbon lens – meaning that initiatives will not just perform for biodiversity but will also have the best possible impact for carbon.

	High Level Target	Key Performance Indicator	Years 4-5 target
HLT4	South Downs National Park Authority to reduce its carbon footprint by 150 tonnes per annum in line with the 2030 net zero target	H4.1 Total annual SDNPA carbon emissions	H4.1 150 tonnes (Co2) reduction on the previous year
HLT5	5% reduction per annum in the overall carbon footprint of the South Downs National Park from the baseline reported in 2019	H5.1 Total tonnes Co2 reported year on year in annual LULUCF (Forestry component) data	H5.1 5% annual reduction (tonnes Co2) from 2019 baseline

Key definitions:

The Forest Information System for Europe provides a simple definition for LULUCF: “LULUCF stands for Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry. The LULUCF sector includes the land use categories: Forest land, Cropland, Grassland, Wetlands, Settlements and Other land...The LULUCF sector comprises emissions and removals from the forest carbon pools above- and below-ground biomass, deadwood, litter, mineral and organic soils. Carbon stored in wood products (sawn wood, panels and paper) is reported in the Harvested Wood Product pool (HWP) and is estimated separately.”

A greenhouse gas emissions assessment and target scenario was completed by Small World Consulting for the South Downs National Park in 2019. The report sets out the minimum target which results in a net zero date of 2045 for the South Downs National Park.

2.3 A NATIONAL PARK FOR ALL

National Parks were created for everyone, and they have a power to nourish, inspire and connect everyone with nature – whether in person or remotely.

We want the South Downs to be a welcoming accessible place for everyone, whether living in the National Park, close to its boundaries or travelling from further afield, to connect with nature, the landscape and our rich cultural heritage. We want it to be a place that supports physical and mental health and well-being. We want to inspire individuals and communities to experience The South Downs National Park and take action to care for it. We want to work with individuals and communities to break down the barriers that stop them from feeling that the National Park is not for them, or which make it difficult for some to visit. We want to continue working to make the landscape more accessible and inclusive to people of all ages and abilities and from all backgrounds.

Our work on connecting people to the South Downs National Park is varied and complex. We will target specific audiences, who face the greatest barriers to access:

- Young people (aged 16-24);
- People from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse/ global majority communities;
- People facing forms of health and access inequalities including disabled people;
- People living in urban areas, especially people facing socio-economic barriers to inclusion.



A NATIONAL PARK FOR ALL: EVIDENCING SUCCESS

The measures and targets have been adjusted for 2025-26 and will be reviewed in detail for the 2026-2031 Corporate Plan.

	High Level Target	Key Performance Indicator	Years 4-5 target
HLT6	Increase diversity of those engaging with, the South Downs National Park	H6.1 % of people from under-represented audiences engaged through volunteering activities H6.2 Number of engagement activities targeted at underrepresented audiences	H6.1 3,500 of people from under-represented audiences engaged H6.2 90 engagement activities
HLT7	Work to make sure the landscape, scenery and tranquillity of SDNP is available to everyone, no matter what their access needs are.	H7.1 Number of sessions facilitated by mobility equipment H7.2 Metres of new and/or improved accessible path H7.3 Number of visits to the digital Accessibility Hub H7.4 Number of downloads for the Seven Sisters Country Park Accessibility Guide	H7.1 100 sessions facilitated H7.2.1 1350m H7.2.2 85 interventions H7.3 10,000 visits H7.4 5,000 downloads
HLT8	Digitally engage 100,000 people per year with the SDNP	H8.1 Total number of E-newsletter subscribers H8.2 Total social media audience H8.3 Total visits to the digital hubs throughout the year: (Nature Recovery, Climate Change, Walking hub, Communities)	H8.1 Achieve 12,000 subscribers H8.2 Grow social media audience to 100,000 in 2025/26 H8.3 60,000 visits to the digital hubs in 2025/26

2.4 ENCOURAGING AND SUPPORTING DELIVERY OF OUR HIGH-LEVEL TARGETS

The High-Level Targets provide the ultimate measures of success for the whole Corporate Plan. Below this are many strands of work.

We have statutory functions - for example in delivering our planning service and managing open access land. Our support for cultural heritage activities provides tangible benefits both economic and in terms of the wellbeing of people who engage creatively. We focus our work on the rural economy within the National Park to inspire businesses to positively contribute to the South Downs National Park purposes. Our planning service needs to strike the balance between protection of landscape character and enabling much needed affordable housing and economic activity.

To deliver our priorities for the National Park it is essential that the Authority is as efficient and effective as possible – making the right decisions, based on the right information and with the confidence that these decisions will deliver across our priorities. The purpose of this area of work is to ensure that we have robust processes in place to support this wider delivery and maximise the impact of the Authority's actions for the National Park.



HOW WE WILL DELIVER OUR HIGH-LEVEL TARGETS

1. PLACE MAKING



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	Corporate Plan Priority	Key Performance Indicator	Years 4-5 target
CP1	Administer the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and S106 – key income streams for delivery	CP1.1 The total CIL and S106 distributed (in £) across the three themes of Nature Recovery, Climate and A National Park for All.	CP1.1 No target required. CIL and S106 distribution to be reported, with case studies.
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	CP2.1 No target required. Qualitative case studies to be produced to support AMR

2. GENERATING INCOME



	Corporate Plan Priority	Key Performance Indicator	Years 4-5 target
CP3	CP 3 Aim to raise self-generated income each year	CP3.1 External income generated through philanthropy, visitor-generated revenue, SSCP and nature-based services	CP3.1 £3.5 million for 2025-26
CP4	CP4 Incubate a number of income generating initiatives, to generate £250k per annum	CP4.1 Number of new income generating pilots, for example, LA Consultancy linked to Green Finance and WEPS, Carbon Platform and commercialisation of conservation services CP4.2 Increase in income that contributes towards core costs or is budget relieving	CP4.1 One new income generating pilot CP4.2 £250,000

3. LAND MANAGEMENT

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	Corporate Plan Priority	Key Performance Indicator	Years 4-5 target
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 CP5.2 No. of estates working towards an endorsed WEP CP5.3 Extent of land in nature friendly farming	CP5.1 One newly endorsed WEP in 2025-26 CP5.2 Estates on their WEP journey WEP contributions to the High-Level Targets will be captured in the SDNPA Annual Review CP5.3 To be reported using case studies in 2025-26
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	CP6.1 No target required. FiPL data contributes to reporting against HLT1, 2, 4 and corporate priorities linked to the economy

4. ECONOMY

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	Corporate Plan Priority	Key Performance Indicator	Years 4-5 target
CP7	Develop the 'Our South Downs' enterprise network	CP7.1 No of businesses signed up CP7.2 No. of Green South Downs certified businesses CP7.3 Total unrestricted income generated in £	CP7.1 60 for 2025-2026 (500 cumulative from baseline of 375) CP7.2 32 (cumulative) by end of 2025-26 CP7.3 £20,000 per annum for 2024-2025 and 2025-2026
CP8	Tourism in the South Downs National Park	CP8.1 No. of businesses signed up to Visitor Giving	CP8.1 2 per annum for 2024-25 and 2025-26 from baseline of 5

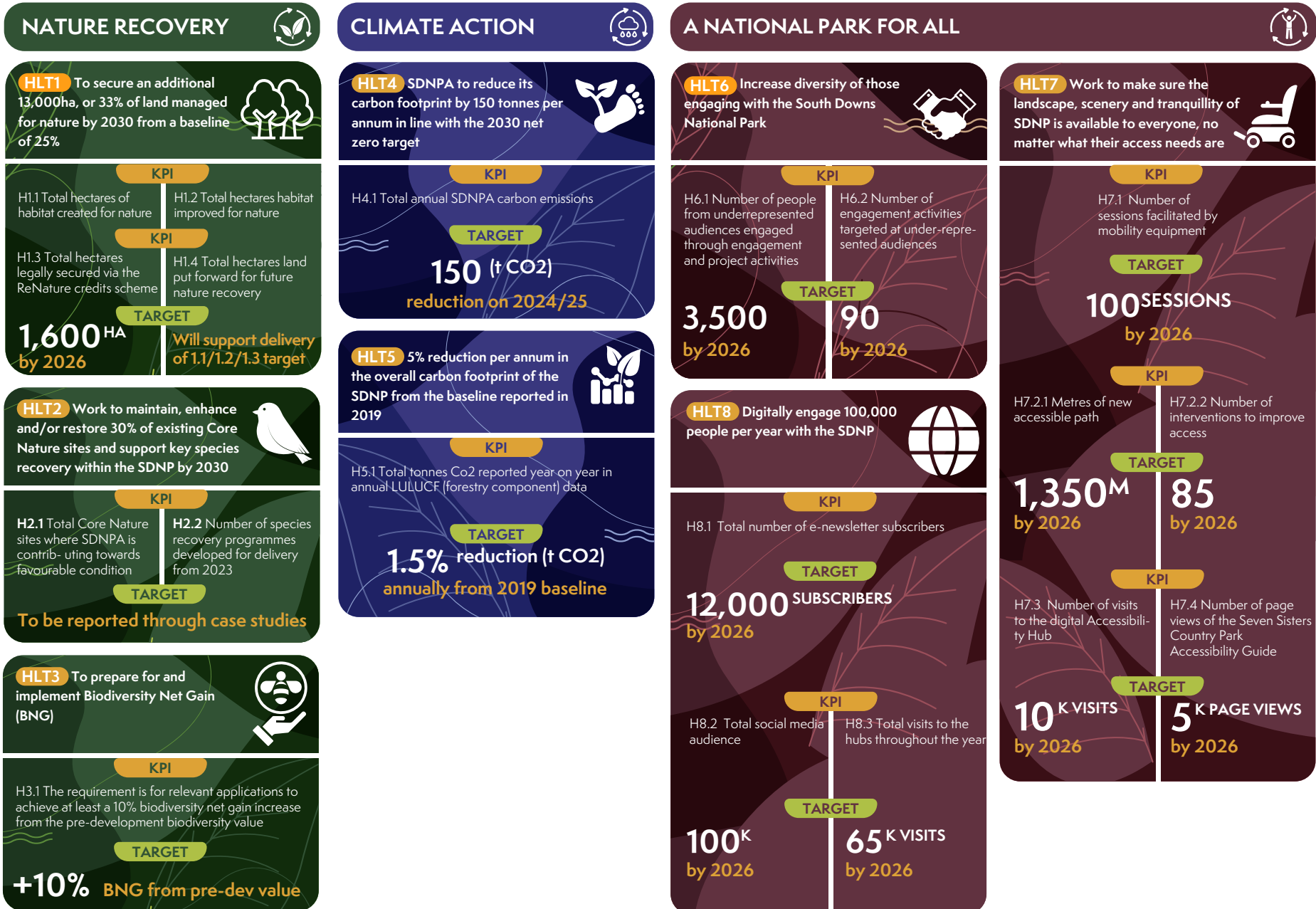
5. AUTHORITY PROCESS

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	Corporate Plan Priority	Key Performance Indicator	Years 4-5 target
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 Staff and Member profile better reflects regional profile CP9.2 Policies in place to ensure the SDNPA is taking positive action to widen the diversity of their staff, boards and volunteers	CP9.1 Establish a baseline of consistent demographic data for staff and Members CP9.2 Policies in place or reviewed as per schedule

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY – HIGH LEVEL TARGETS – ACTION PLAN 2025/26



HOW WE WILL DELIVER OUR HIGH LEVEL TARGETS: CORPORATE PLAN PRIORITIES – ACTION PLAN 2025/26

PLACE MAKING



CP1.1 Total CIL and S106 (£) distributed



CP2.1 AMR to include summary of service provided & case studies

GENERATING INCOME



CP3.1 £3.5m of external income generated through philanthropy, visitor-generated revenue, SSCP and nature-based services



CP4.1 One new income generating pilot



CP4.2 £250k increase in income that contributes towards core costs or is budget relieving

ECONOMY



CP7.1 60 new businesses signed up to 'Our South Downs' (OSD) network



CP7.2 32 Green South Downs certified businesses



CP7.5 £20k Total income generated via OSD



CP8.1 2 businesses signed up to Visitor Giving

AUTHORITY PROCESS

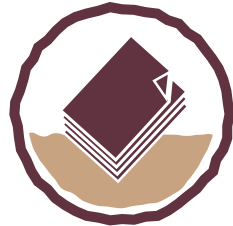


CP9.1 Staff and Member profile better reflects regional profile. Baseline to be established 2025/26



CP9.2 Policies in place to ensure positive action to widen the diversity of SDNPA staff, boards and volunteers

LAND MANAGEMENT



CP5.1 1 Estate with new endorsed WEP



CP5.2.3 Estates working towards an endorsed WEP

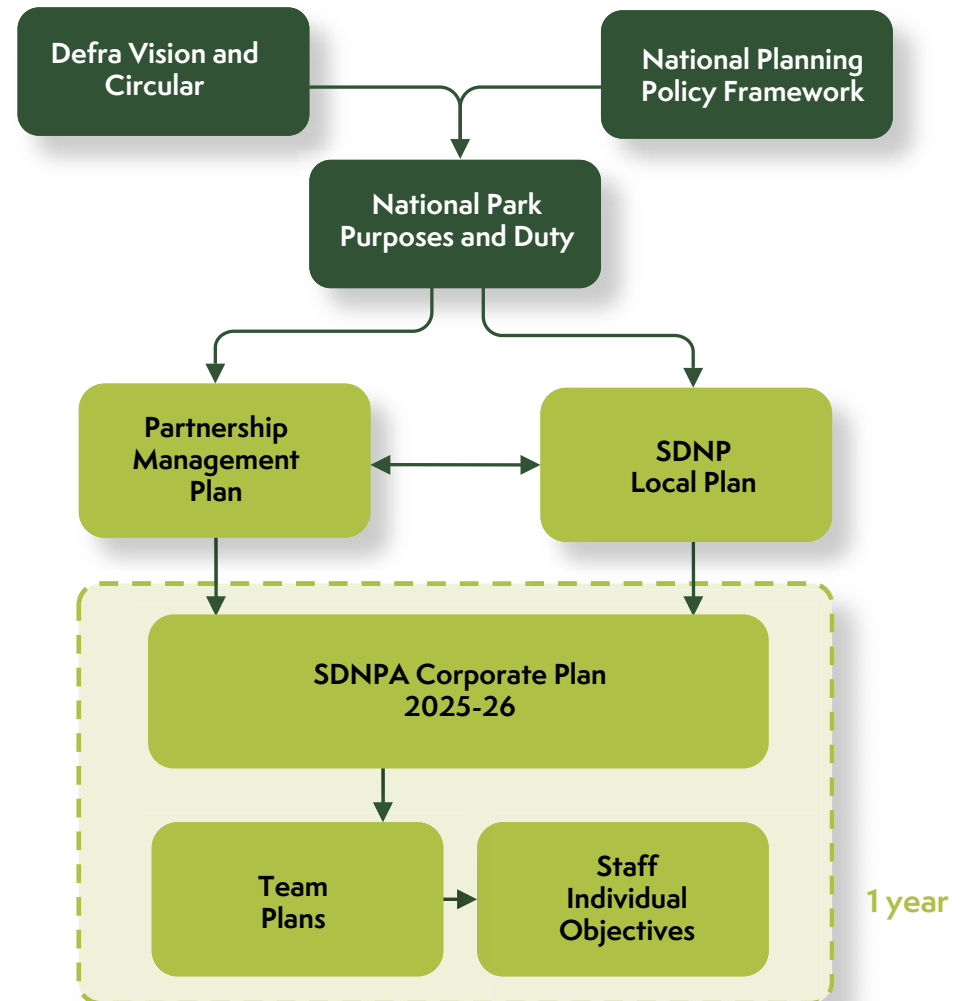


CP6.1 Total FiPL funding (£) allocated to People/Place/Nature/Climate

3. THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH WE WORK

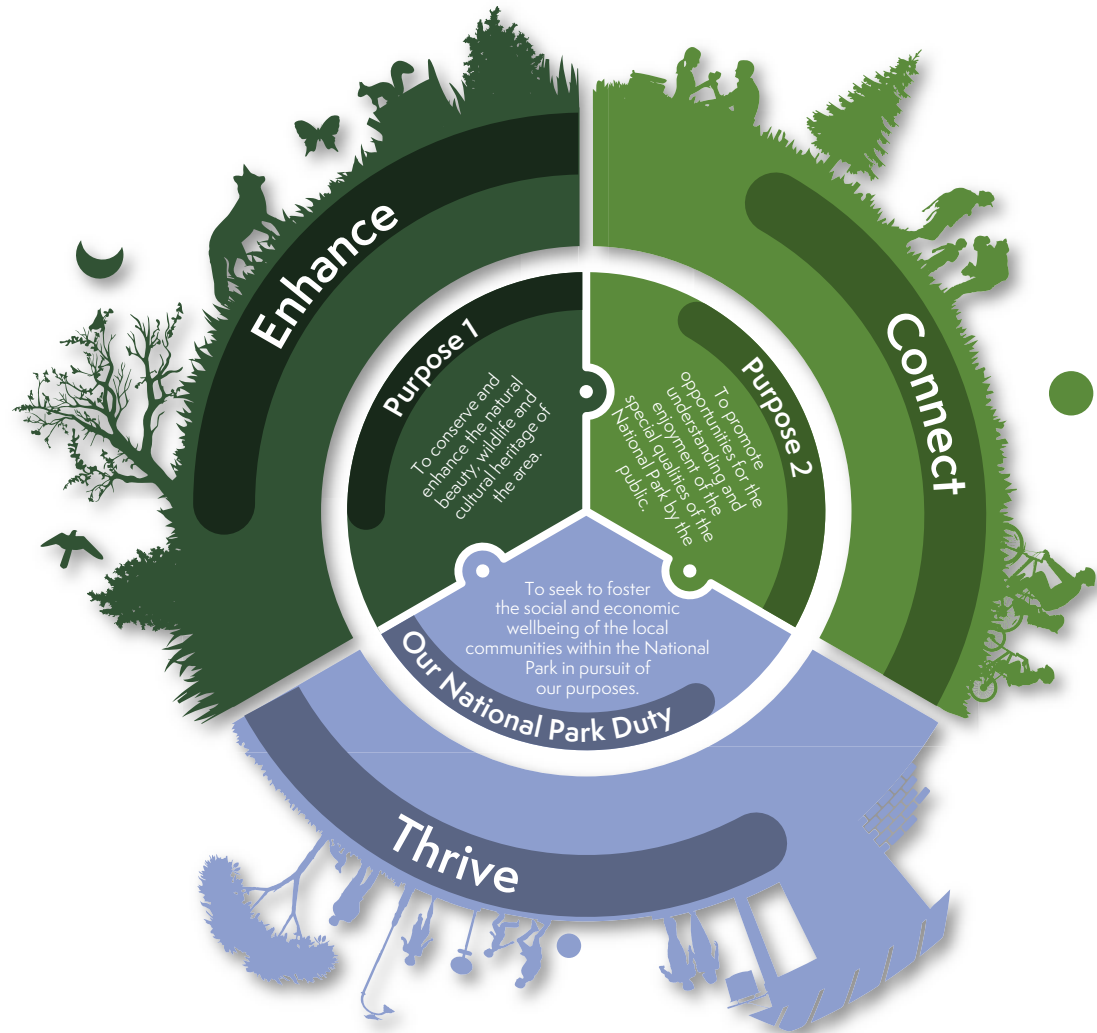
The South Downs National Park Authority's Corporate Plan sets out how we will deliver those elements of the South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) for which we are responsible. All relate back to the 10 Outcomes in the PMP.

The Corporate Plan is one of our key management tools to ensure delivery of our Purposes and Duty. Progress towards demonstrating that we have delivered on our Corporate Plan priorities will be monitored by the South Downs National Park Authority Policy & Resources committee every quarter and published in the Annual Review for 2025-26.



4. NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND THE DUTY ON THE SDNPA

- **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.

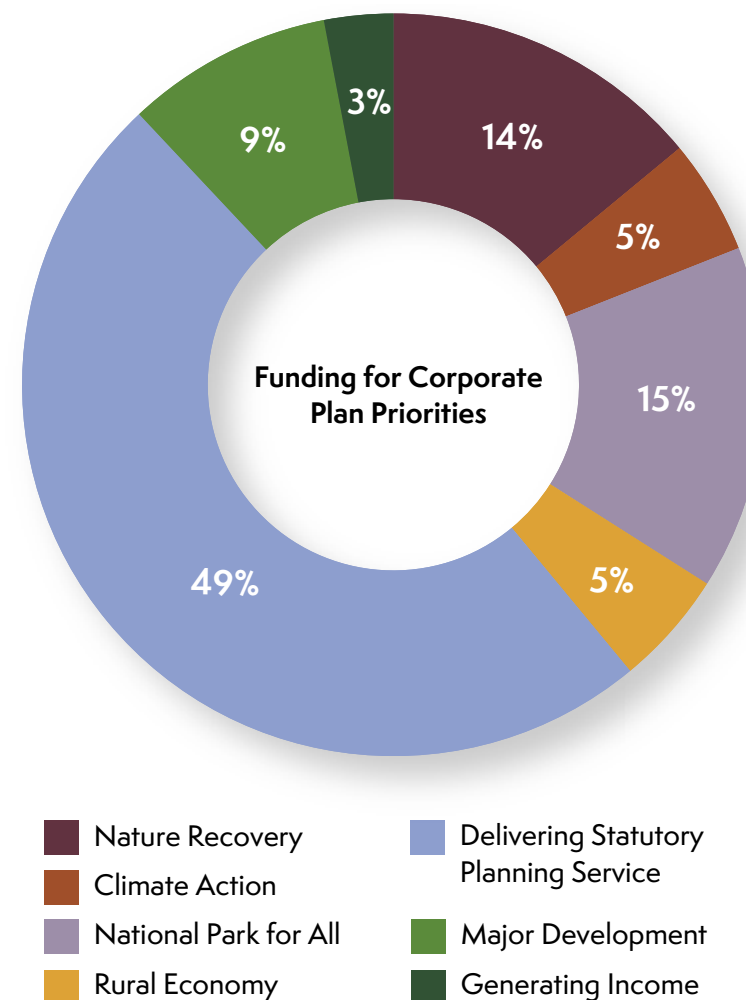


5. OUR RESOURCES

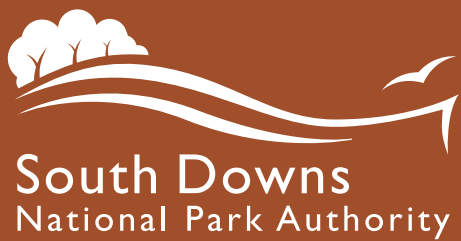
The Authority's budget¹ for the financial year 2025-26 is £12.4million. This is funded from the National Park Grant from Defra of £10.5million, £1.3million from Planning Fees and £0.6m from the new Nature Recovery Initiative, with the remainder being made up from specific grants

On the expenditure side the overwhelming majority of our budget is deployed on core staffing (49%), delivery of the planning service through s101 agreements with host authorities, and underpinning contracts for corporate services such as IT, finance and GIS. The amount of discretionary spend available to fund projects, programmes and partnerships in support of the High-Level targets is therefore very limited, and it is the use of our officer time across the staff structure which is the biggest factor in aligning resources with priorities.

The chart shows how the core funding from the National Park Grant supports the operation of the Authority and contributes to the corporate priorities.



¹ Seven Sisters Country Park expenditure is recovered. The chart excludes support costs.



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