



South Downs

National Park Authority

Agenda Item 18

Report PR24/25-40

Report to **Policy & Resources Committee**
Date **26 June 2025**
By **Performance and Projects Manager & Project Management Lead**
Title of Report **Q4 Corporate Performance report 2024/25**
Note

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

I. Receive and consider the Q4 Corporate Performance and Projects Report 2024/25.

I. Introduction

- I.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Policy & Resources Committee on the Authority's corporate performance during Quarter 3 (Q3) and Quarter 4 (Q4) of 2024/25: 01 October to 31 March 2025.
- I.2 The Policy and Resources Committee has terms of reference which include "To monitor and identify improvements arising from the outcomes and evaluation of projects identified by the Committee, audits, survey and other feedback and make recommendations as appropriate" and "To monitor and review the performance, including financial performance, of the Authority in the context of its business delivery, and the management and maintenance of the Authority's assets in accordance with the Authority's agreed budget, Corporate Plan and other approved plans, and make recommendations for changes as appropriate".
- I.3 The committee is recommended to receive and consider the content of the performance report and make any recommendations arising from its consideration of the report. Any such recommendations would be subject to a vote at the committee meeting.
- I.4 Progress towards Partnership Management Plan (PMP) outcomes is reported via the three High Level Target themed areas and four Corporate Plan priority areas, which includes Grant Funding. Dashboards demonstrating performance are included as appendices and explained in this report. Key project information is also included in this report at section 4.
- I.5 The report provides Members with a progress update for the actions from the Annual Governance Statement and the Human Resources and Health and Safety report (see sections 6 and 7).
- I.6 The report also provides Members with a summary of the annual Compliments, Comments & Complaints report (see section 8). The full report is included at appendix 6.
- I.7 The 2024/25 Annual Review is included as an appendix to this report – see appendix 7.

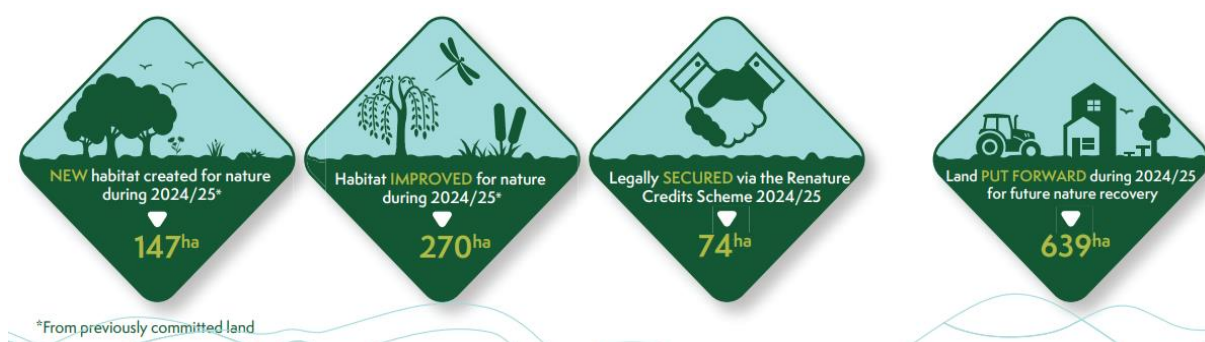
2. Progress against High level targets

2.1 **Appendix I** summarises contributions at Q4 towards the High-Level Targets and Corporate Plan KPIs and provides annual progress comparisons.

Nature Recovery

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

Figure 1



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

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

KPI	KPI Target (2030)	2022/ 2023	2023/ 2024	KPI contribution Q1/Q2	KPI contribution Q3/Q4	Cumulative progress to date (2022 start)
H1.1 Total hectares of habitat created for nature	13,000ha	404ha	13ha	3.9ha	143.53.6ha	564ha
H1.2 Total hectares habitat improved for nature		4,312ha	761ha	42.8ha	226.86ha	5,343ha
H1.3 Total hectares legally secured via the ReNature credits scheme		192ha	593ha	48ha	26ha	859 ha
TOTAL (H1.1, H1.2, H1.3)	13,000ha	4,908ha	1,367ha	94.7ha	396.39ha	6,766ha
H1.4 Total hectares land put forward for future nature recovery	N/A	1,061ha	3,073ha	329.71	309ha	3,912ha

H1.5 Total ha of habitat creation & improvement funded by The South Downs National Park Trust*	2,000ha	N/A	N/A	22.29	5.56	27.85
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** Q1 & Q2 2024/25 was the first period that this H1.5 data has been collected. It has since become clear that this KPI is no longer effective and will be discontinued. See explanation at 2.9.4*

- 2.4 At the end of Q4, a total of **6,766** additional hectares of land have been secured or managed for nature since 2022. This is **52% of the 13,000 hectares target** to be achieved by 2030. Please note that all hectares are estimated and these calculations are based on best available data.
- 2.5 At the end of Q4 a total of 491 hectares of habitat has been created, improved, or secured for nature recovery.
- 2.6 The HLT1 RAG rating has been assessed as 'amber' for this latest quarter, reflecting a measured approach to delivery in 2024/25.
- 2.7 Nature recovery hectares reported are lower than preceding years as large numbers of hectares were previously delivered by FiPL and also green finance, especially in 2022/23 when FiPL projects were focussed on nature recovery projects. In 2023-24 and 2024-25, FiPL funding has been targeted primarily towards projects benefitting people, climate and place. As at Q4, 3912ha have been put forward for green finance initiatives, however it takes time to legally secure the sites for nature.
- 2.8 Despite fewer nature recovery projects being delivered on the ground this year, significant projects and schemes continue to be development and are in early feasibility stages. This should result in continued delivery (hectares) in future years, and successfully meet the ambitious 13,000ha target.
- 2.9 Earlier this year, the Protected Landscape Outcomes Framework Targets (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.

Collaboration

- 2.10 The SDNPA is continuing to contribute towards the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). The Hampshire LNRS went out for public consultation on 12th May 2025, whilst the pan-Sussex approach should follow later in the spring/summer.
- 2.11 A "Water in the South Downs National Park" partner session was run in March 2025 with all 6 catchment partnerships plus other key water sector partners covering the National Park. This follows a review of evidence and catchment plans which provides a baseline for a collaborative approach to water work going forward.
- 2.12 SDNPA has also actively contributed to the development of the collective National Parks Nature Recovery Action Plan. This sets out our collective vision and ambitions for all 15 UK Parks, with 5 Goals helping us to work effectively and collaboratively.
- 2.13 A Park-wide hedgerow initiative has further progressed through SDNPA's purchase of historic hedgerow maps for the 1850-1900 period. We have also commissioned Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) South-East to design a holding level hedgerow plan, and worked with the farmer groups to encourage landscape scale hedgerow projects which the

fundraising team will help resource. This will contribute towards delivering HLT 1 and HLT 2 targets.

Contribution towards targets

- 2.14 H1.1: Examples of on the ground habitat creation during Q3 & Q4 include 138 ha at Halnaker Hill Farm who have delivered significant habitat creation through nature-based solutions.
- 2.15 In addition, at Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP), there has been a new pond in the Semi-Improved Dry Valley, creating a stepping stone between two existing freshwater ponds and the creation of a new scrape for wading birds in First Meander and Redshanks Field work completed by 'Pete The Pond' and funded by a DEFRA bid.
- 2.16 H1.2: Habitat restoration has been delivered, or has been planned, via a broad range of initiatives.
- 2.17 The Bowlers Wood Restoration has benefited from a £5,647 ReNature grant (South Downs Trust) which the Central Team has put towards the funding of wider conservation actions to enhance the success of the woodland restoration project which is subject of an application to the Forestry Commission - Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) restoration. Funding will enable the re-establishment of ride and glade system, pond restoration, and transitioning wood from commercially focussed softwood production to restore species rich & climate resilient native woodland.
- 2.18 Rangers have been working on woodland management, including coppicing on protected sites across the Park, as well hedgerow laying and planting, and heathland connectivity. All of which help to create and fortify natural corridors for wildlife.
- 2.19 Across multiple sites, significant tree planting has taken place, including 1,100 mixed broadleaf trees at Windmill Farm and 1,600 trees at Hinton Ampner, strengthening biodiversity and resilience.
- 2.20 Scrub clearance continues to play a vital role in restoring chalk grassland. Key activities have included creating varied ecotones to benefit invertebrates and reptiles and working alongside Butterfly Conservation to enhance butterfly habitats. Particularly exciting is the collaboration with a new grazing manager, which has led to improved grazing practices on a crucial chalk grassland site—home to the very rare Field Gentian.
- 2.21 The quarter also saw advancements in conservation technology with the introduction of a 'smart raft' system for American mink removal on the River Rother
- 2.22 Pond restoration work has included sediment removal, holly control, and the revival of a dew pond in partnership with the National Trust.
- 2.23 H1.3: Hectareage legally secured for nature has reduced over the last couple of quarters but activity in the pipeline continues including securing 26 hectares at Chilgrove Farm, near West Dean.
- 2.24 H1.4: Land put forward for nature includes 178ha put forward at Cornish Farm near Eastbourne for the Eden Project BNG and 65ha at Atkinsons Farm, East Meon.
- 2.25 H1.5 will be discontinued after this year, as data collection has shown that nature recovery actions are primarily funded through multiple mechanisms, including the South Downs Trust, internal SDNPA funding, and external sources. To avoid double counting, efforts to measure this KPI have been restricted to a small number of sites funded exclusively by the South Downs Trust. This does not reflect the reality of Trust-funded initiatives, which have contributed towards delivery of all the HLT1 indicators this year.

- 2.26 **HLT#2: Work to maintain, enhance and/or restore 30% of existing Core Nature sites and support key species recovery within the SDNP by 2030.**
- 2.27 This HLT was expected to be measured using the following indicators:
- 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
- 2.28 However, data for this target will now be 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 due in Summer 2025. In the interim, key progress towards HLT2 is described in the following paragraphs.
- 2.29 Good progress is being made at Seven Sisters Country Park under the new Countryside Stewardship agreement. However, more widely across the Park, protected sites still need attention to bring into favourable condition. This would be helped by Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) condition assessment monitoring by Natural England but, sadly, these are not yet forthcoming.
- 2.30 The Seven Sisters National Nature Reserve (NNR) has progressed closer to declaration. In January the 8 core partners hosted the Natural England national NNR Team on a site visit. This is a requirement of the declaration process.
- 2.31 SDNPA is working with Natural England to support the Sussex Woods Protected Sites Strategy (PSS), one of 5 national pilots is exploring new and collaborative approaches to improve the condition of protected sites. In Sussex, the focus is to managing fallow deer populations at a landscape scale to enable woodland recovery. Since its launch in 2022, the project has undertaken woodland condition monitoring, deer population monitoring, research and development projects on deer impacts and 'exclosure' trials. Collaborative management and opportunities for new local venison markets have progressed in 2024/5.
- 2.32 We have continued work towards the restoration of the chalk grassland at Butser Hill which is one of the best sites in the UK for the Duke of Burgundy butterfly, a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) protected species. The aim of this project is to thin areas of scrub and graze the grassland to help this butterfly population.
- 2.33 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. This high species diversity, which includes some of the rarest species in the UK, is of national importance.
- 2.34 **HLT#3: To prepare for and implement Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)**
- 2.35 This HLT is measured using the indicators shown in Table 2.

Table 2 HLT3: To prepare for and implement Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

KPI	KPI Target	Annual contribution
H3.1 The requirement is for relevant applications to achieve at least a 10% biodiversity net gain increase from the pre-development biodiversity value.	10% BNG increase (min)	33.5% BNG increase

- 2.36 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%) utilized 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.
- 2.37 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.
- 2.38 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
- 2.39 Biodiversity Net Gain achievements:
- Habitat – average 33.5% across 16 applications
 - Hedgerow – average 65.9% across 9 applications
 - Watercourse – 56% (only 1 application).

Climate Action

- 2.40 **HLT#4: South Downs National Park Authority to reduce its carbon footprint by 150 tonnes per annum in line with the 2030 net zero target**
- 2.41 This HLT is measured using the indicators shown in Table 3.

Table 3

KPI	Year	KPI Target (yrs 4-5)	SDNPA (Tonnes CO ₂)	Change on previous year (Tonnes)
H4.1 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	

**Includes scope 3 emissions*

- 2.42 Data from 2021-2024 was measured through analysis of SDNPA Scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emissions using the DEFRA carbon calculation spreadsheet. However, data for 2024/2025 also includes scope 3 emissions and, as a result, the SDNPA emissions for this latest year are recorded as being much higher. The inclusion of Scope 3 emissions data provides a more accurate picture of greenhouse gas emissions which will help to prioritise decarbonisation efforts.

- 2.43 The RAG rating for this KPI has been marked as amber. Due to the more ‘in depth’ reporting, as well as all buildings at Seven Sisters Country Park being finished and fully operational, the total tonnes of CO₂ has increased from 278.21 in 2023-2024 to 435.19 in 2024-2025.
- 2.44 SDNPA have commissioned Small World Consulting Ltd to carry out an upstream emissions assessment using purchase data and physical consumption data for 2024-2025. Once they have full information on our supply chain, they will be able to advise of any areas where quality of data could be improved, key hotspots for carbon management and areas to target for improvement. This data is due June 2025.
- 2.45 2024/25 saw an update to the SDNPA vehicle fleet with the delivery of the new, all electric, lease vehicle. Data from Q4 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 car journeys.
- 2.46 **HLT#5: 5% reduction per annum in the overall carbon footprint of the South Downs National Park from the baseline reported in 2019**
- 2.47 This HLT is measured using the indicators shown in Table 4.

Table 4

KPI	KPI Target 2024-25
H5.1 Total annual reduction in CO ₂ reported year on year in annual LULUCF Forestry component data in tons	5% reduction (tonnes CO ₂)*

- 2.48 The annual greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory data is due in July 2025 and will be reported in Q2 2025-26. 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.
- 2.49 To improve our CO₂ reporting, in Q4, SDNPA 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. 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.
- 2.50 SDNPA has delivered against our Climate Change Programme this year, through SDNPA directly, and community-based projects that we support. Examples include:
- 27 SDNPA staff have completed Carbon Literacy training with a further 18 colleagues booked in. The Authority 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 (set up by SDNPA) 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.

A National Park for All

2.51 **HLT#6: Increase diversity of those engaging with the South Downs National Park**

2.52 This HLT is measured using the indicators shown in Table 5.

Table 5

KPI	KPI Target (yr 5)	KPI contribution Q1/Q2	KPI contribution Q3/Q4	Annual total
H6.1 Number of people from underrepresented audiences engaged through engagement & project activities	100	5,466*	1,535	7,001
H6.2 Number of engagement activities targeted at underrepresented audiences	30	210*	107	317

**This figure has been adjusted to reflect data captured after reporting deadline date.*

- 2.53 The targets have been increased for the Corporate Plan Bridge Year and new targets are being developed for the next Corporate Plan as previous targets were greatly underestimated.
- 2.54 Some highlights from Q3 and Q4 include:
- 2.55 14 young people attended volunteering activity including independent tasks (footpath monitoring) and habitat management tasks led by Western Downs Ranger team. This supports them to gain their Duke of Edinburgh Award. 60 young people attended at three green careers workshops in Q3.
- 2.56 Ten people attended the final session of year supporting carers in East Sussex to connect to nature and have respite from their caring responsibilities. The session was carried out at Seven Sisters Country Park. Sixteen people attended a walk and lunch for asylum seekers at Seven Sisters Country Park.
- 2.57 Around 140 people, 90 of whom were from underrepresented audiences attended a 'Take Action for Nature', half term Pop Up event at Petersfield Heath in October. 32 people attended an evening of SDNP Landscape focussed films, short walks, stories and music, as part of Black History Month. There were also questions and answers sessions and discussions on nature and access to the landscape. The event was held in partnership with Diversity Lewes and Lewes Football Club.

- 2.58 By the end of Q4, 21 grants had been offered through the 75th Anniversary ReNature grants for schools. This scheme provides grants of up to £1,000 for state-funded schools in and around the National Park to support nature in their school grounds.
- 2.59 During February 2025, over 2,000 people attended events as part of our Dark Night Skies Festival. These events are a great way to engage audiences from in and around the National Park, who would not normally visit.
- 2.60 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.
- 2.61 Over the winter, 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.
- "The knowledge and enthusiasm of the staff was incredible. The activities were well planned and executed, in consideration of our curriculum needs."*
- "...the day was well paced, informative, inspiring to both children and adults, and has left a lasting impression of the importance of the history and habitats of the South Downs - it has even inspired some persuasive writing in our English!"*

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

- 2.62 Q3/Q4 progress against HLT7 is monitored through key performance indicators outlined in Table 6.

Table 6 Progress against HLT7: Increase the diversity of those engaging with the South Downs National Park

KPI	KPI Target (yrs 4-5)	2023/2024	KPI contribution Q1/Q2	KPI contribution Q3/Q4	Cumulative progress (yrs 4-5)
H7.1 Number of sessions facilitated by mobility equipment*	100 per year	151	74	63	288
H7.2 Metres of new and/or improved accessible path	N/A	5,770	5,140**	2,405	13,315
H7.3 Number of visits to the digital Accessibility Hub	5,000	11,260	4,988	3,081	19,329
H7.4 Number of page views of the Seven Sisters Country Park Accessibility Guide	N/A	3,445	4,629	160	8,234

* These figures currently represent bookings at SSCP only.

** This total has been increased to allow for project data to be included as a result of a data lag

- 2.63 This year, SSCP have had 137 bookings for the mobility scooters at Seven Sisters Country Park, achieving our target. Bookings were down 9% on the previous year, this could be attributed to poor weather at usually popular times.
- 2.64 A new Rights of Way and Access Officer was successfully recruited in Q4. The key responsibilities of this role are to oversee the South Downs Local Access Forum and to respond to Rights of Way and Access consultations, including planning applications to ensure that the South Downs is available to everyone.
- 2.65 In Q4, 700 metres of track re-grading and drainage improvements along the South Downs Way between Keymer Post and Clayton Windmills was completed, improving the surface and making it suitable for wheeling. 600 metres of public bridleway was also re-graded and surfaced to make it more accessible on the Slindon Estate in West Sussex.
- 2.66 In November 2024, a 355m section of the Centurion Way was completed on the West Dean estate, including the path and access ramp.
- 2.67 Ongoing planning for the expected delivery of access improvements across the networks in 2025/26 has continued, liaising with ranger teams, private landowners and Brighton & Hove City Council.
- 2.68 **HLT#8: Digitally engage 100,000 people per year with the SDNP**
- 2.69 Q3/Q4 progress against HLT8 is monitored through key performance indicators outlined in Table 7.

Table 7 Progress against HLT8: Digitally engage 100,000 people per year with the SDNP

KPI	KPI Target (yr5)	2023/24	2024/25	Change on previous
H8.1 Total number of E-newsletter subscribers	11,500	11,989	13,326	+11%
H8.2 Total social media audience	110,000	97,774	115,876	+18.5%
H8.3 Total visits to the hubs throughout the year: (Nature Recovery, Climate Change, Walking hub, Communities*)	20,000	27,694	25,502	-7.9%

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

- 2.70 SDNPA has a total social media audience of 115,876 followers. This total includes the SDNPA, Seven Sisters Country Park and South Downs National Park Trust social media channels.
- 2.71 The SDNPA social media audience has grown considerably this year due to successful digital campaigns.
- 2.72 Reaching currently underrepresented and younger audiences is a key priority for us. This year we have looked to reach out in new ways across our digital channels. This has included:
- working on targeting a younger audience through Youtube shorts.

- "tiktok" style reels.
- developing a series of dark skies podcasts called "Embrace the Darkness."
- developing a series of Health & Wellbeing focussed podcasts.
- supporting the development of content and podcasts by new and unheard voices through supporting a podcasting workshop.

2.73 We have seen a steadily growing increase in our Youtube views, particularly among younger audiences.

2.74 Total visits to the hubs has easily met the annual target, despite overall number of visits being slightly fewer than last year. It is positive that visit numbers have been roughly consistent; these vary hugely depending on season, weather and other external factors.

3. Progress against Corporate Plan Priorities

Place Making

3.1 Two priorities are associated with 'Place Making':

- CPI Administer the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and S106
- CP2 Provide specialist advice in respect of Conservation, Design and Landscape across the organisation

3.2 Quarterly progress has been monitored through the key performance indicators outlined in Table 8.

Table 8 Progress against Place Making - CPI & CP2

KPI	KPI contribution Q1/Q2	KPI contribution Q3/Q4	Annual total
CPI.1 The total CIL and S106 distributed (in £) across the three HLTs	£ 1,113,950.15	£ 984,108.94	£2,098,059.09
CP2.1 Summary of service provided to be included in the Authority's Annual Monitoring Report	N/A	N/A	Highlights from the annual AMR report are included in this Q4 reporting

3.3 Highlights of progress towards CPI include:

- In Q3/Q4, CIL distributed £562,858.42; this has been spent on 19 projects incorporating nature recovery and a national park for all priorities. Projects include improving tree planning, stile free access paths, improving school and community facilities, installing new changing places toilets and highway improvement schemes.
- In Q3/Q4, S106 distributed £421,250.52. This has funded affordable housing, refurbishing public toilets, nitrate mitigation monitoring and nature recovery.

3.4 Highlights of progress towards CP2.1 have been included in the AMR, published April 2025. A brief summary of progress is described below.

- 3.5 This year, the review of the South Downs Local Plan progressed in accordance with the timetable set out in the LDS that was approved at the December 2022 National Park Authority. Various evidence base studies were either progressed or completed to keep the work on track.
- 3.6 A key piece of work was the Land Availability Assessment (LAA) with the work of visiting and assessing sites being completed. Members were kept informed of work during the year, including potential sites and policy amendments, and steered the direction of travel.
- 3.7 In November 2024, Planning Committee and National Park Authority determined that the Local Plan Review could go to the Regulation 18 Consultation in the period January to March 2025.
- 3.8 Here are a number of headline findings highlighted in the 2023/24 AMR:

A Thriving, Living Landscape

- Biodiversity Net Gain was achieved (average 34% Habitat and 66% Hedgerow, with a 56% gain in Watercourse in one application)
- Habitat creation at Iford Estate, Lewes and Wiston Estate, Steyning secured during reporting period for Biodiversity offsetting

People Connected with Places

- 65 camping pitches permitted
- A total of 115 net units of visitor accommodation were permitted

Towards a Sustainable Future

- A net total of 2,147 dwellings have planning permission but are unbuilt
- Of these 541 are defined as affordable homes
- 143 dwellings were completed in 2023/24 in the National Park, of which 31 were affordable
- We have a 5.9-year supply of deliverable housing sites
- 6,347m² net total of employment floorspace was completed in 2023/24
- Agricultural buildings were repurposed to provide 3,813m² of new employment floorspace

Generating income

- 3.9 In line with the proposals agreed at Policy & Resources (P&R) Committee, full applications for new projects over £50k are shared with the Committee Chair. Officers have also agreed to keep Members sighted on these applications through regular reports to P&R. Table 9 below, includes everything submitted since the last report to P&R in November 2024 which has now received a final outcome.

Table 9

Funder & Scheme	Project	Status	Value	Lead
National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative	Woolbeding – Expanding the view	Successful	£324,090	SDNPA

- 3.10 Applications over £50k, currently in consideration, can be seen in Table 10. These will be reported in future updates until they have achieved a final outcome.

Table 10

Funder & Scheme	Project	Status	Value	Lead
National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative	Boosting Butser Butterflies	Successful EOI, working up full bid	£100,000	SDNPA
West Sussex Lane Rental Fund	Centurion Way	EOI submitted	£450,000	SDNPA
National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative Round 15	Rotherlands Connections	Full application submitted	£232,086	SDNPA
Southern Water	Support for Big Chalk	EOI submitted	£154,000	TBC

- 3.11 **CP3 Aim to raise £2.5 million self-generated income p.a. through bids to Statutory sources & support for the SDNP Trust in continuing to build a philanthropic income stream.**
- 3.12 Quarterly progress against CP3 has been monitored through the key performance indicators outlined in Table 11.

Table 11 Progress against Generating income - CP3

KPI	KPI Target (yr5)	KPI contribution Q1/Q2	KPI contribution Q3/Q4	Annual Total
CP3.1 Total self-generated income raised (£)	£2.5m	£2,280,799*	£744,903	£3,025,702

**This figure has been adjusted to reflect counting error in Q2 report where a cumulative total had been reported for Q2 instead of a quarterly total.*

- 3.13 Progress in the latter half of the year has ensured we have achieved well over the annual target. This was down to the success of a significant National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) bid, for the National Trust's Woolbeding Project (£324,909 secured), alongside gifts from a number of our longstanding Major Donors.
- 3.14 Other successes include securing a new £90k partnership with the OBS Group and £50k in funding from Lewes District Council for the Ouse Valley Climate Action (OVCA) community pitch.

3.15 CP4 Incubate a number of income generating initiatives, building on Seven Sisters and the South Downs Trust

3.16 Quarterly progress against CP4 has been monitored through the key performance indicators outlined in Table 12.

Table 12 Progress against Generating income - CP4

KPI	KPI Target (yr5)	KPI contribution Q1/Q2	KPI contribution Q3/Q4	Annual Total
CP4.1 Total income (£) generated through the new Green Finance Off Set and Brokering service	£300k	£173,300	£134,803	£308,104
CP4.2 Number of new income generating pilots	1	0	1	1
CP4.3 Total income (£) generated through core cost recovery on externally funded projects	£200K	£173,000*	£33,474	£206,474

**This figure has been adjusted to reflect counting error in Q2 report where a cumulative total had been reported for Q2 instead of a quarterly total.*

- 3.17 CP4.1: Q4 saw an upturn in activity from both landowners aspiring to secure land use change for nature recovery, funded by private finance, and 'off-takers' looking to purchase ReNature Credits. Offtake agreements play a critical role in project financing, they ensure stability for producers and buyers by formalising terms for the future sale of goods or resources before production begins. The last quarter to the financial year ended with £100,826.01 of income being generated for that quarter.
- 3.18 2024/25 has been a significant year for SDNPA nature-based solutions work which incorporates ReNature Credits. This work has delivered just over 1,600 ha of new space for nature, generated £602K for the Authority (since 2023) created & established a new voluntary nature market for biodiversity, developed a woodland platform to accelerate woodland planting and worked in partnership with National Parks Partnership to roll out a sharing/ training package to other National Parks, which we hope to extend to National Landscapes in the next financial year.
- 3.19 CP4.2: Sales in Voluntary Biodiversity Credits (VBCs) has grown steadily since the launch in Q2. VBC Sales have unlocked over £37K of private finance for Nature Recovery. This accelerated growth is a direct result of increased capacity through appointing a Nature-based Solutions Officer in Q3 whose focus has been on developing the VBC market.
- 3.20 Overall, this year has seen a number of new income generating opportunities crystallise. These include the South Downs Woodland Carbon Platform and the Voluntary Biodiversity Credits market as a way of accelerating nature recovery in the National Park.

- 3.21 CP4.3: The South Downs Trust now requests an optional 15% contribution from donors toward core costs, these contributions will pass back to the SDNPA at year end. This approach will enhance full cost recovery in future years and reduce the SDNPA's financial support for the Trust over time.

Land Management

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

Table 13 Progress against Land management – CP5 & CP6

Corporate Plan Priority	KPI	KPI Target (yrs4-5)	Annual contribution
CP5 Facilitate and support the endorsement, actions and key priorities through the process of Whole Estate Plans (WEPs)	CP5.1 No. of Estates with new endorsed WEPS	N/A	2
	CP5.2 No. of estates working towards an endorsed WEP	N/A	5
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	£1,025,749 FiPL Year 4 programme budget	£1,025,747.44 (100%)

- 3.23 Q4 has seen progress made on Whole Estate Plans with the endorsement of the Lancing College Estate WEP on 20th February. This endorsement is the tenth in the South Downs National Park.
- 3.24 There are currently 5 Estates with WEPs at various points in the process. These are; Westerlands Estate (on the agenda for this meeting of the committee), Foley Manor Estate, Firle Estate, Bereleigh Estate, and Plumpton College.
- 3.25 From a Year 4 FiPL programme budget of £1,025,749, a total of £1,025,747.55 has been spent (equating to a £1.56 underspend). Collectively, the Year 4 projects have achieved all four programme outcomes of Climate, Nature, People and Place.
- 3.26 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.
- Total projects supported: 37
 - Total land supported (ha) 2357
 - Trees Planted: 245

- Hedges planted (m): 430
- Ponds created/restored: 4

Economy

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

Table 14 Progress against Economy – CP7 & CP8

Corporate Plan Priority	KPI	KPI Target (yrs4-5)	2023/24	2024/25	Cumulative progress to date
CP7 Develop the 'Our South Downs' (OSD) enterprise network	CP7.1 No of businesses signed up	420	375	55	430
	CP7.2 No. of Green South Downs certified businesses	35	27	3	30
	CP7.5 Total unrestricted income generated in £	£60,000	£44,280	£86,364	£130,644
CP8 Tourism in the South Downs National Park	CP8.1 No. of businesses signed up to Visitor Giving	4	3	3	6

- 3.28 CP 7.1: Organic growth over the last two quarters has been in line with expectations, though the year as a whole was successful, driven by our involvement with the Fair Game project.
- 3.29 CP 7.2 has an amber RAG rating. Our original targets set were based on a growth rate of 50%, this was very ambitious when compared to the benchmark for rest of the UK, where retaining baseline is seen as very good and growth of anything up to 5% is excellent.
- 3.30 Businesses have cited economic issues for not renewing, growth is dependent on external economic factors.
- 3.31 At the end of Q4, 30 businesses have gone through the Green South Downs Certification to date. Ending the year on a positive note, Vintage Bentley joined the scheme in Q4 with a proactive approach to sustainability and innovation.
- 3.32 CP 7.5: This has been a very successful year for income generation, estimated at £130k from multiple sources showing how collaborating closely with businesses can support Nature Recovery in the National Park. A highlight for this quarter has been developing a specific Wild Venison directory, hosted by Our South Downs in collaboration with Natural England to support venison supply chains, and with it ongoing Deer Management.
- 3.33 In addition, end of year contributions saw Woodfire Camping raising nearly £1000, and the Pig in the South Downs raising £4500 for the South Downs Trust.

- 3.34 CP 8.1: Tourism businesses are responding positively to the National Park's shared ambition around Regenerative Tourism, which is helping to establish a link between visitor payback scheme and nature recovery - showing the potential of tourism to benefit nature and communities. By working with the South Downs Trust, the Rural Economy team now have better lead generation opportunities for a 2-3 month trial on marketing software to identify potential partners for Visitor Giving.
- 3.35 Marmalade MTB signed up to Visitor Giving in Q4, offering a % of sales on their mountain bike tours and guided trips on South Downs trails.

Projects in delivery

4. As of Quarter 4 end, there were 34 projects in delivery. This includes 29 projects with a green RAG rating and **five projects with an amber RAG rating**. These five projects are listed below. Please see the quarter 4 Projects dashboard at Appendix 3 for more detailed project performance.

4.1 Amber RAG rating:

- Centurion Way: this project is 33% complete. This project has seen actual and potential delays against critical milestones. However, this will not affect the overall project delivery. National Trust have retracted consent to construct through sections 5 (Wellhanger) & 6 (Littlewood) in 2025 as a reaction to a challenge by Sussex Bat Group. Scheduled work was cancelled and the programme is being adjusted.
- Changing Chalk - Grazier Post: this project is 75% complete. This project is contingent on farmers who are busy people and are impacted by current events, not least fast-moving changes in agri-environment and goods markets. Additionally, the external consents required and project-related paperwork can present barriers.
- Ebernoe and Butcherlands Landscape Enhancement Scheme: this project is 42% complete. The project is still underspent due to delays with the tree works in year 1, but Sussex Wildlife Trust? have caught up with key elements of this during year 2 and anticipate being back on track during year 3.
- Grandfather's Bottom: this project is 72% complete. The car park refurbishment works at Butser Hill are still delayed, which is out of SDNPA control. Hampshire County Council are the lead partner for the project. The works are due to start over the summer. Overall, this will not affect the project delivery. All other aspects of the project are on track.
- Rother Valley Way Development: this project is 75% complete. This project remains rated amber, due to lack of definitive progress with securing landowner agreements. This is not an existential threat to the project, but does mean that the project is likely to take much longer or need to explore alternative route alignments.

5. Project Performance Reporting: Strategic Fund Implications

- 5.1 At the end of Q4, there is a balance of £131,116,31 unallocated in the Strategic Fund, this amount takes into account £269,168 that was allocated in 2024/2025 to projects.
- 5.2 Following the end of year 2024/5 outturn, the balance in the Strategic Fund at the end of May is currently only £17,000 (allowing for committed project funding). This is due to the reduction in our revenue Defra grant settlement and the need to under-write some multi-year projects. As a consequence, OMT (with SLT support) has agreed to temporarily close the Strategic Fund to new expressions of interest. The situation will be reviewed later in the year.

5.3 The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) details 6 actions for 2024/25. These are monitored and reported on quarterly. See Appendix 4 for progress on the Annual Governance Statement actions for Q4.

6. Human Resources & Health and Safety

6.1 The Human Resources & Health and Safety paper detailed 8 actions for 2024/25. These are monitored and reported on quarterly. See Appendix 5 for progress on the Human Resources and Health and Safety actions for Q4.

7. Compliments, Comments and Complaints

7.1 During the year the SDNPA received 13 compliments and 41 complaints about its services.

7.2 Of these 41 complaints, two related to Countryside Policy and Management (CPM), with the remaining 39 relating to the Planning function (including for the host planning authorities who undertake planning work on our behalf). Of the 13 compliments, 7 were for Corporate Strategy, 3 for CPM and 3 for Planning.

7.3 During the reporting period, 25 comments on the services of the SDNPA were sent to the feedback team for review, this reflects a small percentage of the feedback the SDNPA received through other channels. Of these comments 24 provided positive feedback (1 - Corporate Strategy, 3 – CPM, 21 – Planning) and one neutral comment provided an offer of guidance and information. This data does not reflect the number of comments the SDNPA receives through all communication channels, or comments and issues which are received informally and resolved in the usual business of the National Park.

7.4 There were four complaint decisions received from the Ombudsman in the reporting year. Three were closed after initial enquiries and not investigated further. The fourth decision was not upheld. Sensitive content within the report meant it was withheld from publication by the LGO, as such we cannot include the case details within our LGO summary. Further information about compliments, comments and complaints and the Ombudsman's investigations is at Appendix 6.

8. Annual Review 2024/25

8.1 The Annual Review at Appendix 7 showcases the excellent work the Authority has undertaken this year to progress our Corporate Plan priorities.

9. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	Projects may come forward for approval in future. No further decisions are required as a direct result of this report.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	There are no direct resource implications to this report.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Value for money for individual projects and pieces of work are assessed at the development stage, midway through a project and at the end, through an evaluative process that is reported to this Committee. Setting aside a fund to support projects represents a positive return on investment as it enables projects to go ahead which might not otherwise.

Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	We have listed in the report and appendices which PMP outcomes and corporate plan objectives our corporate and project work link to. Generally speaking all projects and work will deliver against one or more PMP outcome.
Links to other projects or partner organisations	Where appropriate these are set out in the report.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	Please see the Climate Action section of this report which sets out high level targets around climate action.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	None
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Yes - Priority area three outlines the projects that have a specific focus on encouraging all people including those with protected characteristics and those from our target audiences of young people, people experiencing health inequalities and conditions, people from diverse backgrounds and people from areas experiencing socio-economic deprivation to engage with and access the National Park. Completed EDI assessments are required at project approval stage for projects across all priority areas from Q3 2023/24. Any issues identified are highlighted within this report.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal??	None
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	None
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	None
Are there any Data Protection implications?	None

10. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

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

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Unforeseen changes to the level of funding provided by relevant Government departments for future years	Possible	Moderate	A robust monitoring and project approval system with regular reporting to relevant Committees on projects. The budget available is set to sit with a Corporate Plan, setting out clear priorities to support delivery of Partnership Management Plan outcomes.

There may be some risks to our reputation if we are unable to provide match funding for some of our larger projects. This would also potentially reduce the types of funding we were able to apply for.	Probable	Moderate	<p>The main mitigation for this is to keep close scrutiny of the Strategic Fund and apply a rigorous prioritisation process when approving those projects that commit the SDNPA to significant funding over a number of years. As a result of this, a decision has been made by OMT to temporarily close the Strategic Fund for new funding approvals.</p> <p>Further mitigation for this risk is the work that will be carried out to generate income for the South Downs National Park and also potentially for the SDNPA.</p>
Lack of robust data or changes to data makes it difficult to provide trend information	Possible	Moderate	<p>SDNPA has contracts in place to provide a range of data and this is regularly reviewed. Changes to the data required as a result of Government requirements have been factored into future planning as far as is possible. We also have several pieces of work aimed at improving our data and monitoring capacity.</p>

Liz Gent

Performance and Projects Lead

South Downs National Park Authority

Contact Officer: Liz Gent

Tel: 01730 819238

Email: liz.gent@southdowns.gov.uk

Appendices:

1. a & b Corporate Performance Summary 2024-25
2. Corporate Performance Dashboard 2024-25
3. Project Summary Dashboard 2045-25
4. Q4 2024-25 Annual Governance Statement update
5. Q4 2024-25 Human Resources & Health and Safety update
6. CCC (Compliments, Comments, Complaints) report 2024-25
7. SDNPA Annual Review 2024-2025

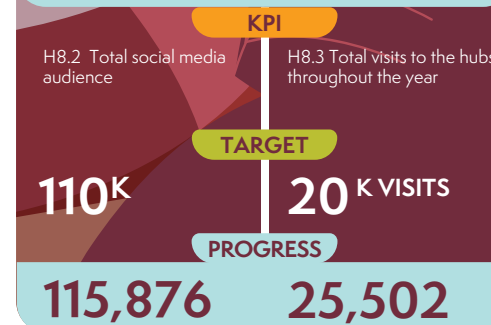
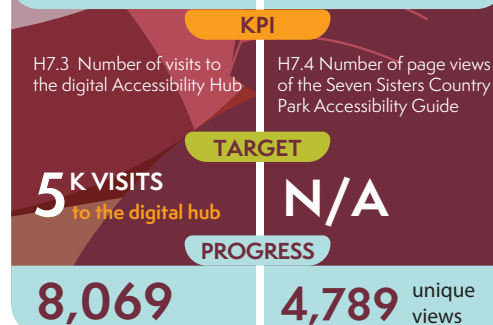
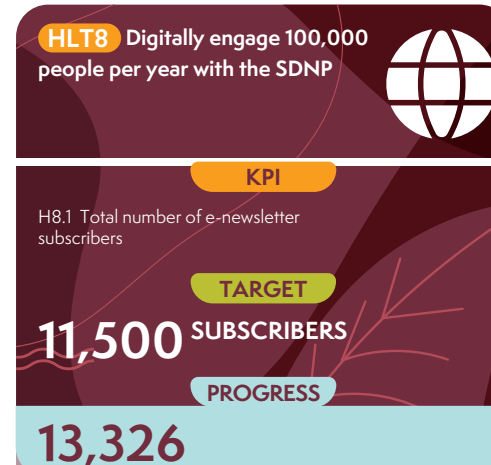
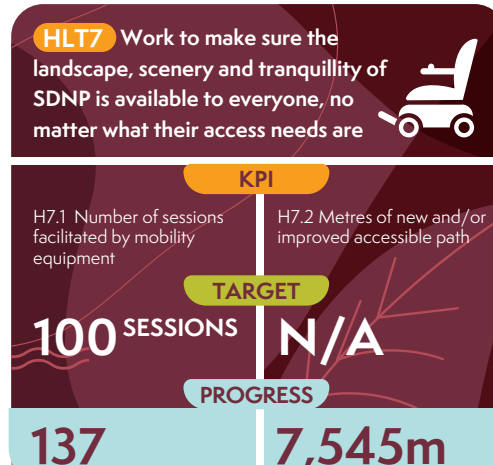
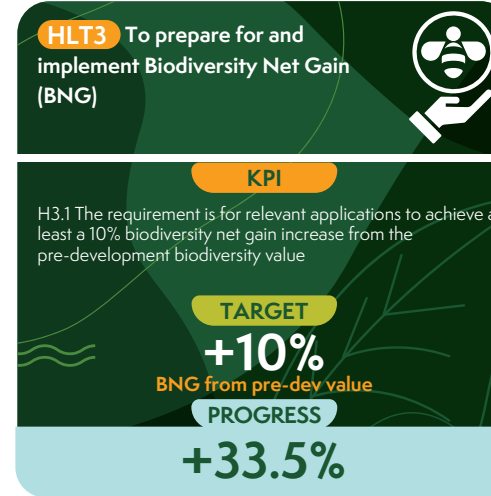
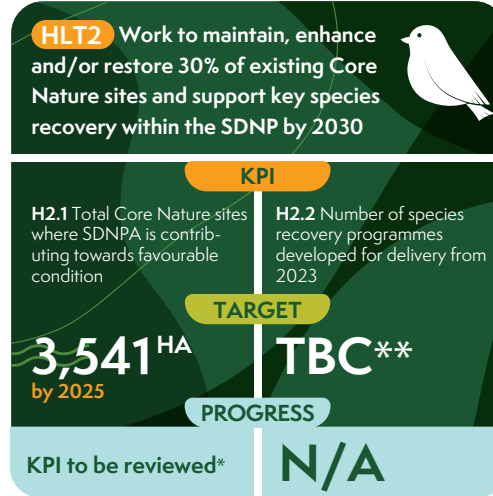
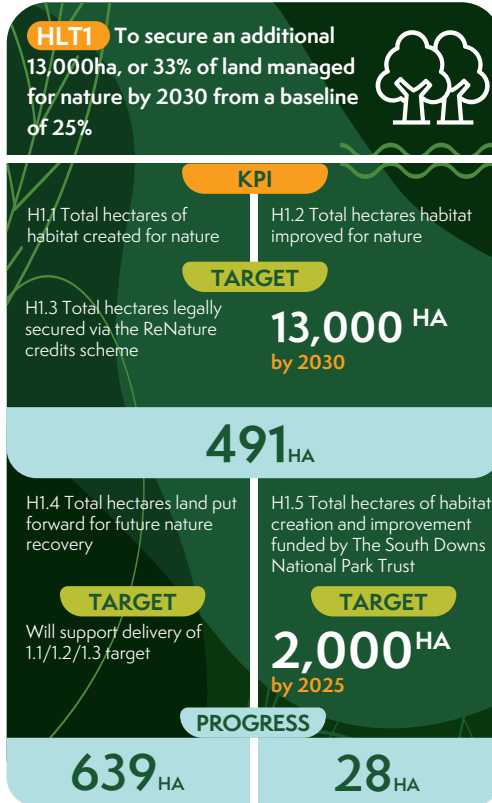
SDNPA Consultees: Chief Executive; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services, Interim Business Service Manager; Countryside and Policy Managers

External Consultees: None

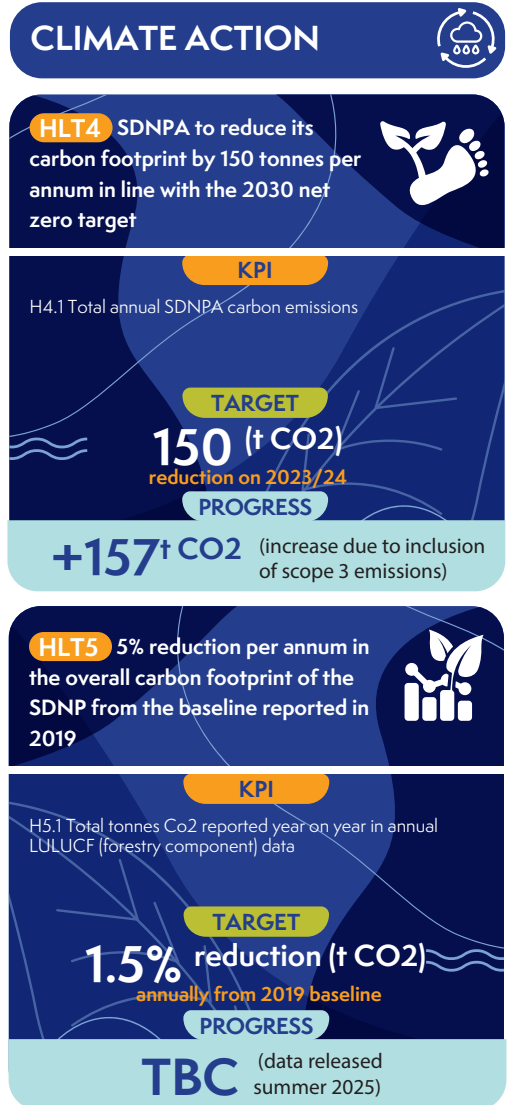
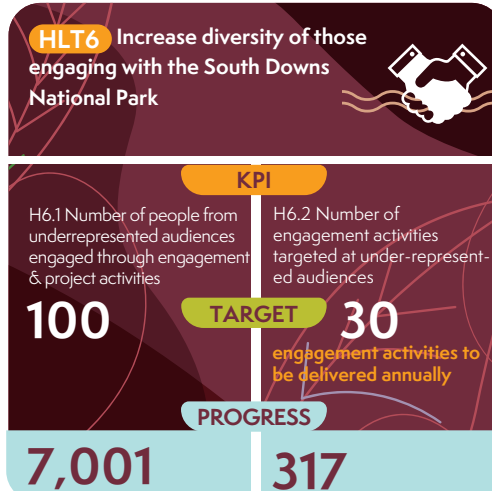
Background Documents: [Corporate Plan 2020-25 year 4-5 action plan](#)

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY – HIGH LEVEL TARGETS – ANNUAL PROGRESS 2024/25

NATURE RECOVERY



A NATIONAL PARK FOR ALL



* KPI to be developed in line with the new Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework
** Target to be developed with Natural England in line with the new Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework

HOW WE WILL DELIVER
OUR HIGH LEVEL TARGETS:
CORPORATE PLAN
PRIORITIES – ANNUAL
PROGRESS 2024/25



Summary of performance against High Level Targets in Q1-Q4 2024-25.

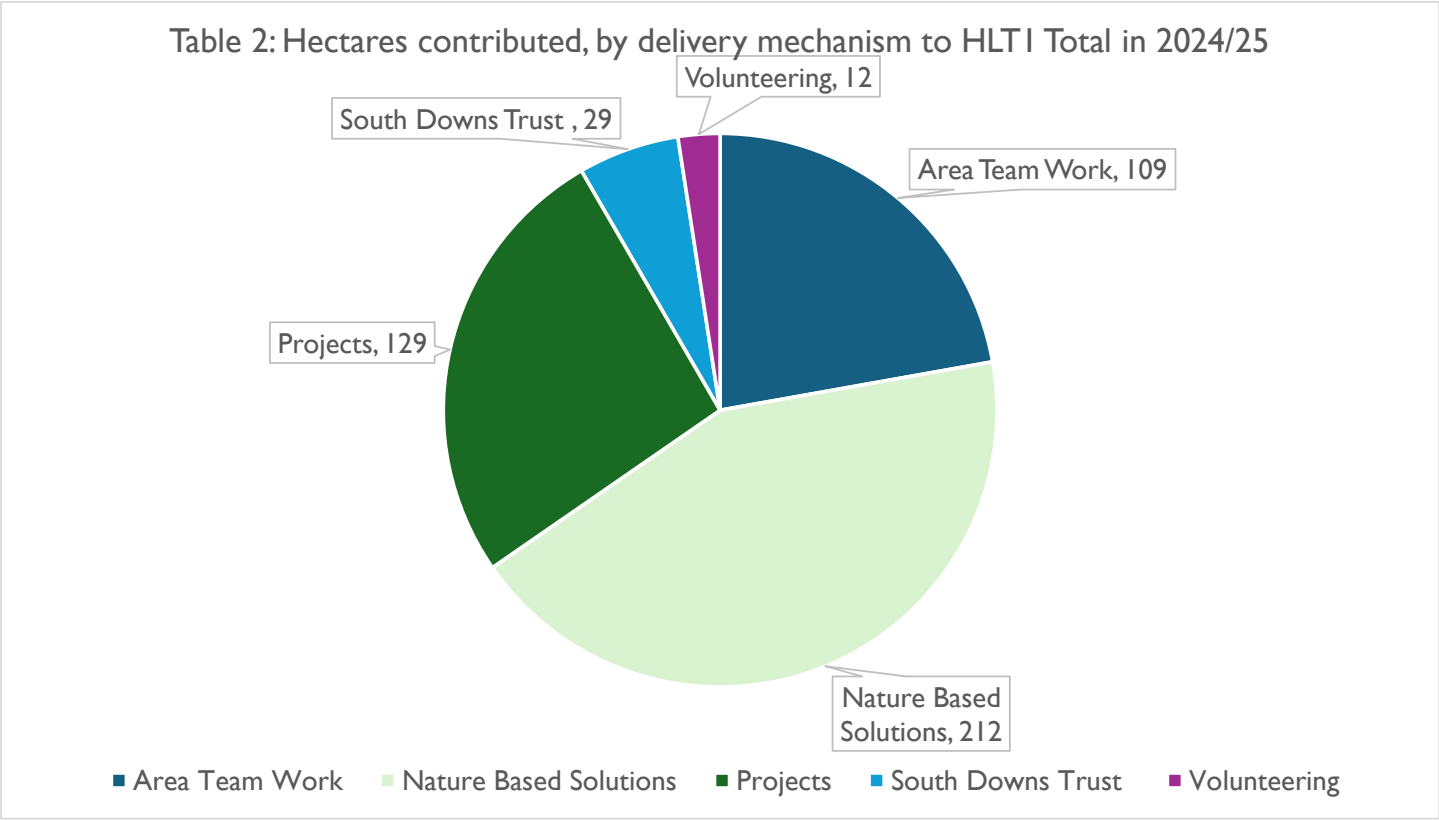
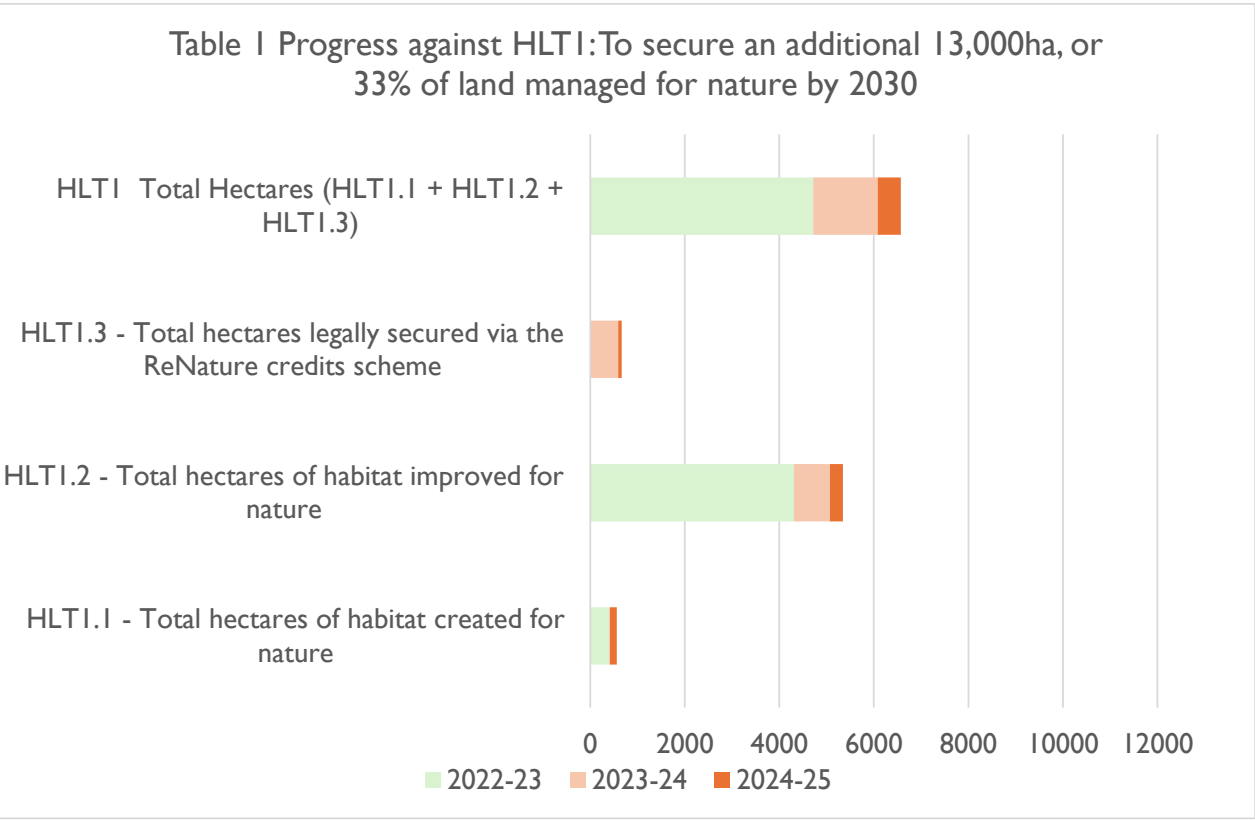
This dashboard highlights a selection of High Level Targets for which trend data is emerging and will be developed in line with data improvements.

Nature Recovery

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

	Cumulative progress to date (2022 start)	2024/25
HLT1.1 - Total hectares of habitat created for nature	564	147
HLT1.2 - Total hectares of habitat improved for nature	5,343	270
HLT1.3 - Total hectares legally secured via the ReNature credits scheme	859	74
HLT1 Totals (HLT1.1 + HLT1.2 + HLT1.3)	6,766	491

At the end of Q4, a total of 6,766 additional hectares of land have been secured or managed for nature since 2022. This is 52% of the 13,000 hectares target to be achieved by 2030. In 2024-25 491 hectares have contributed to the target, which is lower than in previous years . The HLT1 RAG rating has been assessed as ‘amber’ for this latest quarter, reflecting a measured approach to delivery in 2024/25 . Despite fewer nature recovery projects being delivered on the ground this year, significant projects and schemes continue to be development and are in early feasibility stages. These projects will need to go into delivery in 2026-27 to restore momentum towards the 13,000 target.



HLT#3: Applications to achieve at least a 10% biodiversity net gain increase from the pre-development biodiversity value.

KPI	KPI Target (yrs 4-5)	Annual contribution
H3.1 The requirement is for relevant applications to achieve at least a 10% biodiversity net gain increase from the pre-development biodiversity value.	10% BNG increase (min)	33.5% BNG increase

Climate Action

The HLT3 RAG rating has been assessed as green as BNG levels achieved are 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.

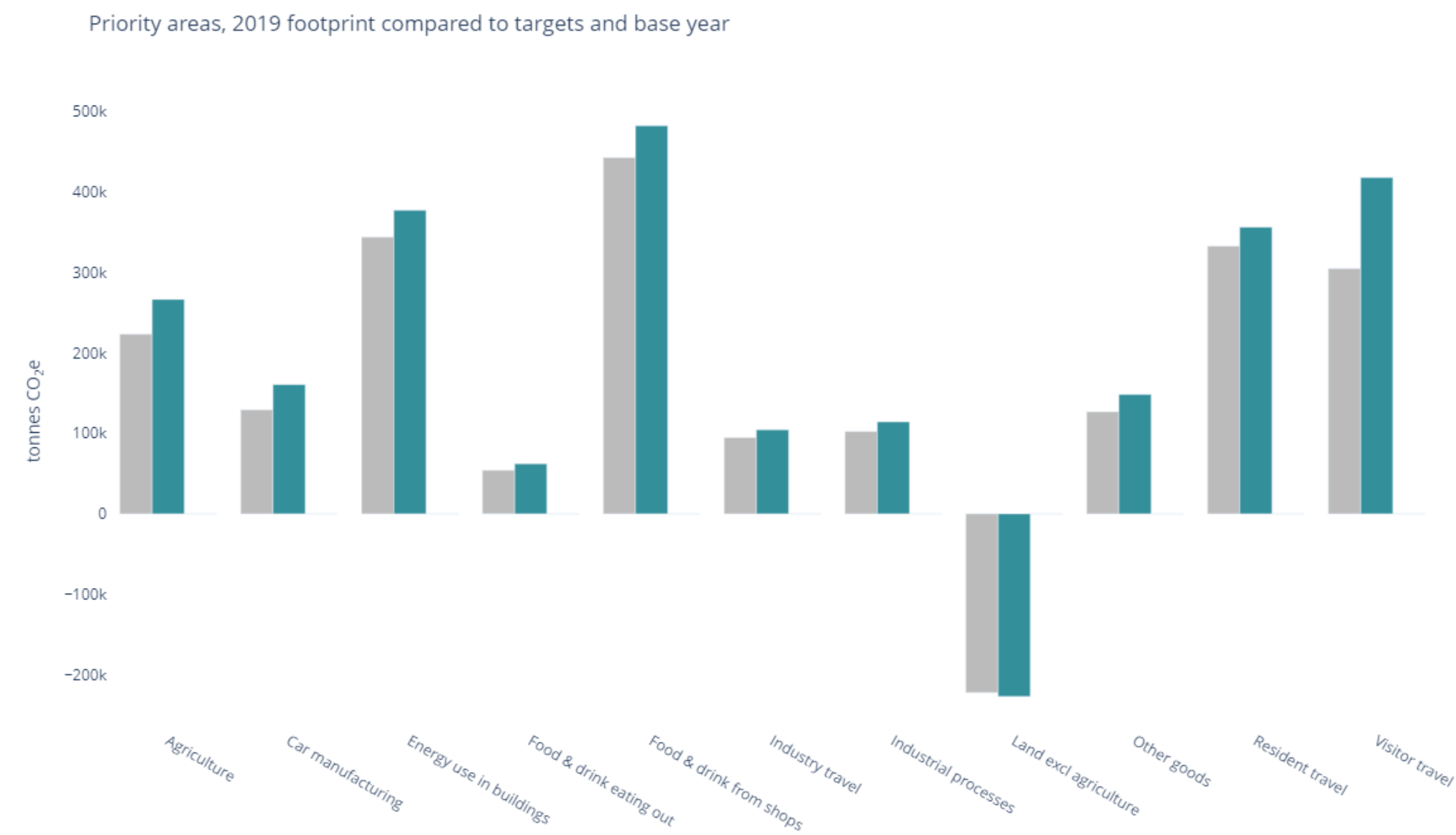
HLT#4: South Downs National Park Authority to reduce its carbon footprint by 150 tonnes per annum in line with the 2030 net zero target.

KPI	Year	KPI Target (yrs 4-5)	SDNPA (Tonnes CO2)	Change on previous year (Tonnes)
H4.1 Total annual SDNPA carbon emissions	2024/25	435.19*	435.19*	156.98
	2023/24	278.21	278.21	-4.8
	2022/23	283.01	283.01	16.44
	2021/22	266.57	266.57	

*includes scope 3 emissions

Data from 2021-2024 was measured through analysis of SDNPA Scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emissions using the DEFRA carbon calculation spreadsheet. However, data for 2024/2025 also includes scope 3 emissions and, as a result, the SDNPA emissions for this latest year are recorded as being much higher. The inclusion of Scope 3 emissions data provides a more accurate picture of greenhouse gas emissions which will help to prioritise decarbonisation efforts. 2.13.3 The RAG rating for this KPI has been marked as amber. Due to the more ‘in depth’ reporting, as well as all buildings at Seven Sisters Country Park being finished and fully operational, the total tonnes of CO2 has increased from 278.21 in 2023-2024 to 435.19 in 2024-2025

HLT#5: 5% reduction per annum in the overall carbon footprint of the South Downs National Park from the baseline reported in 2019 Reported annually in Q2



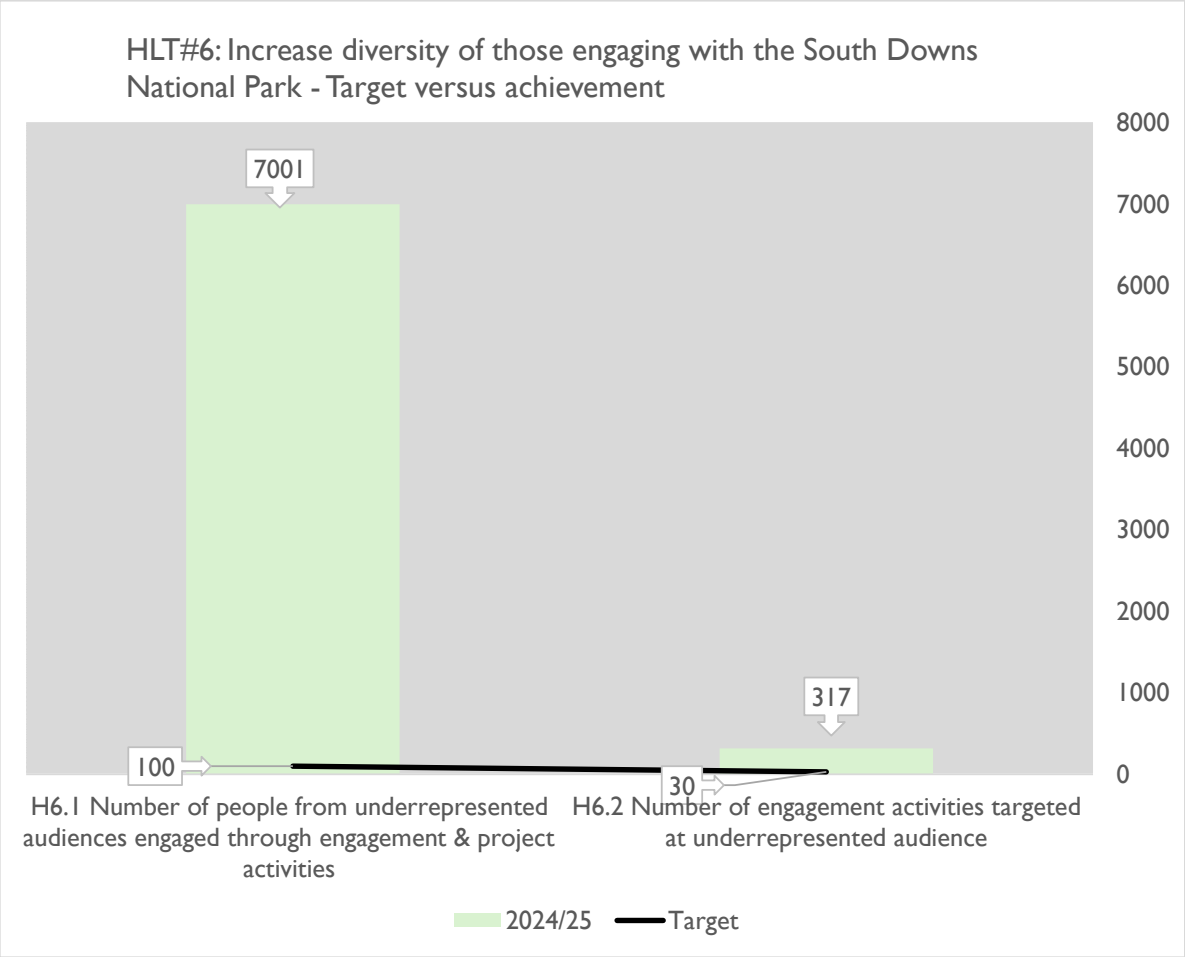
Footprint changes since baseline year compared to target progress

	Baseline (2022)	Footprint 2019	% change since baseline
Residents' footprint: priority subset	1,267,081.6	1,392,607.7	9.0
Visitors' footprint: priority subset	399,165.5	536,660.5	25.6
Land use (incl agriculture)	874.3	39,359.2	97.8

The above dashboard and chart has been created by Small World Consulting using Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) data. In 2019, the South Downs National Park carbon baseline was calculated. Subsequently in 2022, changes to datasets and calculation methodology by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero resulted in a new baseline being calculated. The annual greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory data is due in July 2025 and will be reported in Q2 2025-26. 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.

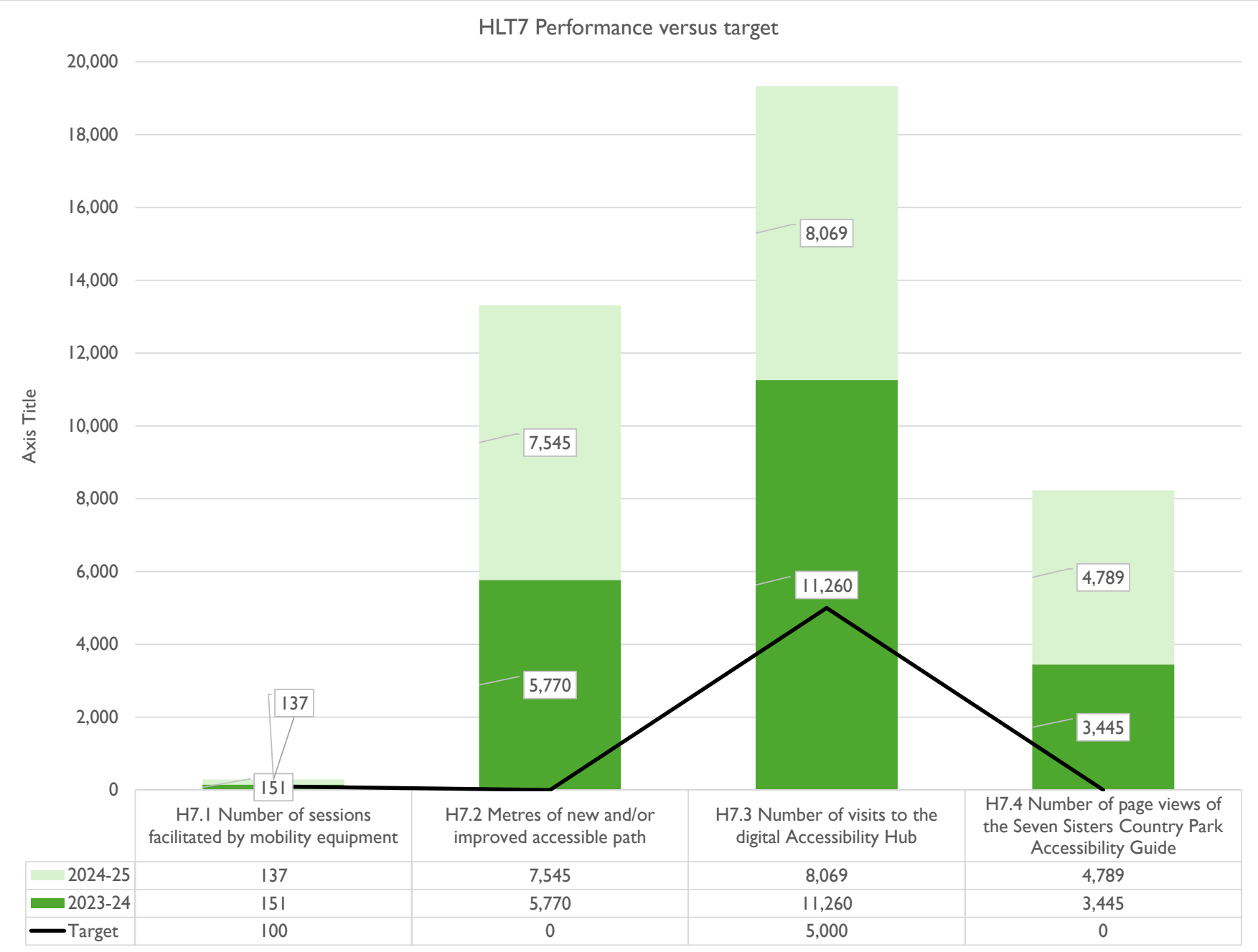
A National Park for All

HLT#6: Increase diversity of those engaging with the South Downs National Park



2024-25 saw 7001 people from underrepresented audiences engaged across 317 events and activities. The targets have been increased for the Corporate Plan Bridge Year and new targets are being developed for the next Corporate Plan as previous targets were greatly underestimated. Some highlights from Q3 and Q4 include over 2,000 people attending events as part of the Dark Night Skies Festival. These events are a great way to engage audiences from in and around the National Park, who would not normally visit. By the end of Q4, 21 grants had been offered through the 75th Anniversary ReNature grants for schools. This scheme provides grants of up to £1,000 for state-funded schools in and around the National Park to support nature in their school grounds. HLT 6 is RAG rated green due to strong delivery across 2024-25.

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



In 2024-25, HLT7 has performed well and has been RAG rated as “green”. This year, SSCP have had 137 bookings for the mobility scooters at Seven Sisters Country Park, achieving our target. Bookings were down 9% on the previous year, this could be attributed to poor weather at usually popular times.

Access highlights in Q4 include new path, re-grading and surfacing work across the South Downs Way and Centurion way. Ongoing planning continues for the expected delivery of access improvements across the networks in 2025/26.

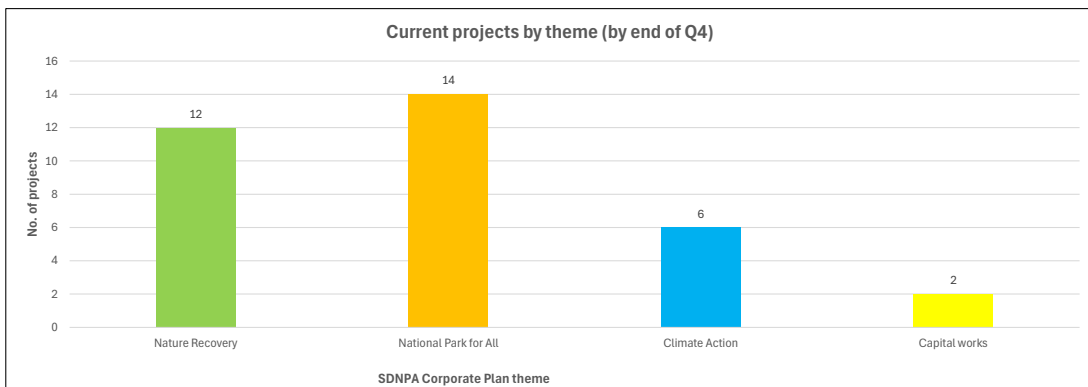
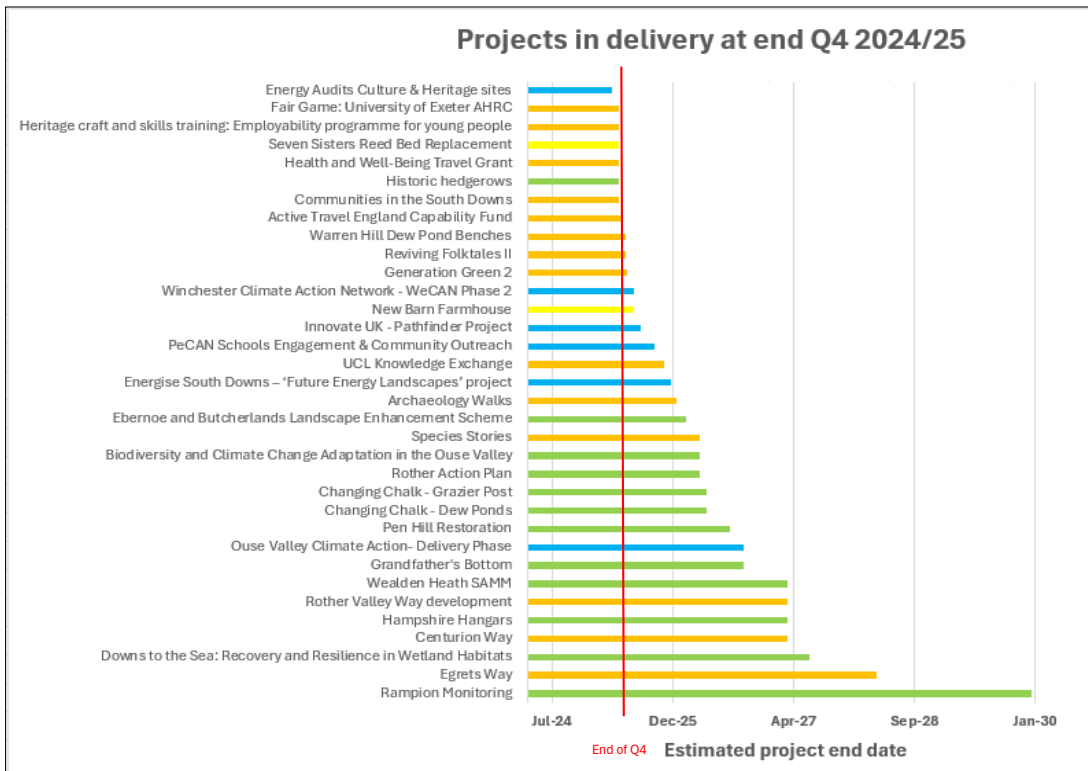
HLT# 8: Digitally engage 100,000 people per year with the SDNP

KPI	KPI Target (yr5)	2023/24	2024/25	Change on previous
H8.1 Total number of E-newsletter subscribers	11,500	11,989	13,326	11%
H8.2 Total social media audience	110,000	97,774	115,876	18.50%
H8.3 Total visits to the hubs throughout the year: (Nature Recovery, Climate Change, Walking hub, Communities*)	20,000	27,694	25,502	-7.90%

HLT8 is rated as green as the targets have been achieved. SDNPA has a total social media audience of 115,876 followers. This total includes the SDNPA, Seven Sisters Country Park and South Downs National Park Trust social media channels. The SDNPA social media audience has grown considerably this year due to successful digital campaigns. Total visits to the hubs has easily met the annual target, despite overall number of visits being slightly fewer than last year. It is positive that visit numbers have been roughly consistent; these vary hugely depending on season, weather and other external factors.

Summary of projects in Q4

No. of projects in delivery at end of Q4:	34
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Projects in delivery at end of Q4 2024-25

Project Name	Project Manager	Overall Project Completion	Overall RAG This Quarter	SDNPA Contribution	External Contribution	Total Project Cost	Total Project Spend To Date	% Spend of Whole Budget
Active Travel England Capability Fund	Andy Gattiker	<div><div></div></div> 75%	Green	£0 ¹	£ 100,000	£ 100,000	£ 75,000	<div><div></div></div> 75%
Archaeology Walks	Anooshka Rawden	<div><div></div></div> 15%	Green	£ 8,330	£ -	£ 8,330	£ 8,330	<div><div></div></div> 100%
Biodiversity and Climate Change Adaptation in the Ouse Valley	Cath Jackson	<div><div></div></div> 25%	Green	£ 10,000	£ 70,000	£ 80,000	£ 50,000	<div><div></div></div> 63%
Centurion Way	Colin Carre	<div><div></div></div> 33%	Amber	£ 499,000	£ 3,043,847	£ 3,542,247	£ 1,361,318	<div><div></div></div> 38%
Changing Chalk - Dew Ponds	Jan Knowlson	<div><div></div></div> 90%	Green	£ 25,000	£ 60,700	£ 85,700	£ 73,458	<div><div></div></div> 86%
Changing Chalk - Grazier Post	Cath Jackson	<div><div></div></div> 75%	Amber	£ 90,000	£ 72,334	£ 162,334	£ 77,542	<div><div></div></div> 48%
Communities in the South Downs	Alex Pringle	<div><div></div></div> 85%	Green	£ 50,000	£ -	£ 50,000	£ 31,000	<div><div></div></div> 62%
Downs to the Sea: Recovery and Resilience in Wetland Habitats	Michael Edmonds	<div><div></div></div> 0%	Green	£ -	£ 2,487,203	£ 2,487,203	£ -	<div><div></div></div> 0%
Ebernoe and Butcherlands Landscape Enhancement Scheme	Michael Edmonds	<div><div></div></div> 42%	Amber	£ -	£ 123,293	£ 123,293	£ 29,252	<div><div></div></div> 24%
Egrets Way	Alister Linton-Crook	<div><div></div></div> 20%	Green	£ -	£ 55,000	£ 55,000	£ 36,748	<div><div></div></div> 67%
Energise South Downs – 'Future Energy Landscapes' project	Sara Osman	<div><div></div></div> 40%	Green	£ 19,125	£ 17,300	£ 36,425	£ 10,500	<div><div></div></div> 29%
Energy Audits Culture & Heritage sites	Chris Hannon	<div><div></div></div> 100%	Green	£ 15,000	£ -	£ 15,000	£ 15,000	<div><div></div></div> 100%
Fair Game: University of Exeter AHRC	Anooshka Rawden	<div><div></div></div> 95%	Green	£ 23,350	£ 125,000	£ 148,350	£ 148,350	<div><div></div></div> 100%
Generation Green 2	Amanda Elmes	<div><div></div></div> 99%	Green	£ -	£ 60,690	£ 60,690	£ 19,767	<div><div></div></div> 33%
Grandfather's Bottom	Dawn Kirby	<div><div></div></div> 72%	Amber	£ 30,000	£ 238,965	£ 268,965	£ 78,938	<div><div></div></div> 29%
Hampshire Hangars	Dawn Kirby	<div><div></div></div> 10%	Green	£ -	£ 351,461	£ 351,461	£ 20,610	<div><div></div></div> 6%
Health and Well-Being Travel Grant	Kate Drake	<div><div></div></div> 100%	Green	£ 8,600	£ 50,000	£ 58,600	£ 3,394	<div><div></div></div> 6%
Heritage craft and skills training: Employability programme for young people	Anooshka Rawden	<div><div></div></div> 10%	Green	£ 12,000	£ 18,000	£ 30,000	£ -	<div><div></div></div> 0%
Historic hedgerows	Cath Jackson	<div><div></div></div> 100%	Green	£ 6,000	£ -	£ 6,000	£ 6,000	<div><div></div></div> 100%
Innovate UK - Pathfinder Project	Sara Osman	<div><div></div></div> 70%	Green	£ -	£ 160,860	£ 160,860	£ 80,179	<div><div></div></div> 50%
New Barn Farmhouse	Liz Gent	<div><div></div></div> 5%	Green	£ 207,000	£ -	£ 207,000	£ 6,938	<div><div></div></div> 3%
Ouse Valley Climate Action- Delivery Phase	Steph Summers	<div><div></div></div> 80%	Green	£ -	£ 2,244,999.19	£ 2,244,999.19	£ 1,340,972.42	<div><div></div></div> 60%
PeCAN Schools Engagement & Community Outreach	Sara Osman	<div><div></div></div> 80%	Green	£ 38,550	£ 90,750	£ 129,300	£ 63,299	<div><div></div></div> 49%
Pen Hill Restoration	Nick Heasman	<div><div></div></div> 75%	Green	£ -	£ 75,000	£ 75,000	£ 33,581	<div><div></div></div> 45%
Rampion Monitoring	Dawn Kirby	<div><div></div></div> 60%	Green	£ -	£ 158,700	£ 158,700	£ 155,123	<div><div></div></div> 98%
Reviving Folktales II	Anooshka Rawden	<div><div></div></div> 80%	Green	£ 3,820	£ -	£ 3,820	£ 3,820	<div><div></div></div> 100%
Rother Action Plan	Liz Gent	<div><div></div></div> 15%	Green	£ 60,000	£ 67,500	£ 127,500	£ 67,500	<div><div></div></div> 53%
Rother Valley Way development	Andy Gattiker	<div><div></div></div> 75%	Amber	£ 50,000	£ 25,000	£ 75,000	£ 50,000	<div><div></div></div> 67%
Seven Sisters Reed Bed Replacement	Liz Gent	<div><div></div></div> 100%	Green	£ 200,000	£ 516,000	£ 716,000	£ 754,448	<div><div></div></div> 105%
Species Stories	Anooshka Rawden	<div><div></div></div> 0%	Green	£ 12,500	£ 27,500	£ 40,000	£ -	<div><div></div></div> 0%
UCL Knowledge Exchange	Anooshka Rawden	<div><div></div></div> 95%	Green	£ 3,818	£ 11,600	£ 15,418	Unknown ³	
Warren Hill Dew Pond Benches	Anooshka Rawden	<div><div></div></div> 95%	Green	£ 5,000	£ 12,671	£ 17,671	£ 17,671	<div><div></div></div> 100%
Wealden Heath SAMM	Colin Carre	<div><div></div></div> 75%	Green	£ -	£ 766,831	£ 766,831	£ 604,818	<div><div></div></div> 79%
Winchester Climate Action Network - WeCAN Phase 2	Sara Osman	<div><div></div></div> 80%	Green	£ 25,000	£ 5,000	£ 30,000	£ 27,715	<div><div></div></div> 92%
				£ 1,402,093.00	£ 11,036,204.35	£ 8,895,450.35		

Notes/comments

¹ In our Active Travel England (ATE) bid submission we committed to match their funding on ATE work, by continuing the work we start this year into next year and beyond. No SDNPA cash contribution has been added to this project because this 'match' funding is not separate funding allocated to the ATE project, but our existing spend on linked projects such as Egrets Way, South Downs Way and Centurion Way. Therefore, our contribution is already captured under other projects, so it's not included here to avoid double counting. This project, Egrets Way, South Downs Way and Centurion Way are all ATE projects.

² £830,272 of the total project cost is unsecured funding. We have secured £2,711,975 of funding so far, but the total forecast cost of the project is £3,542,247.

³ Partner spend is unknown for these two projects. These projects are led by partners, and we are contributors. It is difficult to monitor quarterly spend of funding that partners have applied for and secured from external sources, as the priority is for them to report this to the funder. We support the generation of external funding through supporting project design, providing letters of support, being part of partnership agreements and where appropriate, providing cash match contributions.

AGENDA ITEM 18 APPENDIX 4: ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT ACTIONS FOR 2024/25: Q4 UPDATE

Action	Commentary	Next steps and/or potential risks
Review of the Authority’s Fraud and Anti-corruption and Whistleblowing Policies (ongoing from 23-24).	Whistleblowing Policy revised and awaiting approval. Fraud and Anti-corruption Policy to be updated following end of 24/25 financial year.	Whistleblowing Policy approval by SLT. Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy to be reviewed by CFO and Head of Finance and Corporate Services.
Continue to ensure good governance mechanisms are in place to support the Authority’s evolving work in the area of Green Finance.	Green Finance workstream continues in line with the approach endorsed by the Authority in October 2024. Green Finance reserve continues to be maintained with the Authority's long-term commitments in mind.	A watching brief is being held on future opportunities, including those potentially unlocked by a future general power of competence. Governance implications will be considered as and when possible opportunities arise.
Review the Authority’s Risk Strategy and Guidance, including the Authority’s risk appetite statement.	This has been completed and was approved by the committee in September 2024.	None.
Review the Authority’s protocols, including the Local Protocol for Members and Officer Relations, which support the Member Code of Conduct.	Ongoing.	Ongoing.
Take appropriate actions to ensure the good governance of Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) following the review into the operating arrangements at SSCP which will report to the NPA in July 2024.	The management of SSCP has been successfully brought in-house in line with the governance arrangements agreed by the Authority. SSCP was included in the Authority's budget setting process for 25/26 and the operating plan for SSCP was agreed by the Authority in March 2025. The end of year processes for the financial year 24/25 have been completed. The company accounts will be filed with Companies House in due course.	Ongoing quarterly financial and performance monitoring by P&R Committee.
Support changes to the Senior Leadership team through close liaison, advice and training, as appropriate, to ensure the continued good governance of the Authority.	New Chief Executive Office induction completed. Recruitment of new Director of Growth and Business Development completed; new Director starting 1 June 2025.	Embedding of new directorate structure. Close liaison with SLT to ensure good governance will continue through future changes.

AGENDA ITEM 18 APPENDIX 5: HUMAN RESOURCES HEALTH & SAFETY: Q4 UPDATE

Action	Commentary	Next steps and/or potential risks
Chief Executive recruitment process	Complete - Successful modified recruitment process working with external consultants and Members	
Reintroduction of apprenticeship programme	Approval from SLT on a phased reintroduction of apprenticeship scheme; budget approval; Set up of the apprenticeship workgroup; approval of 3 new CPM apprentices (1 SDPA +2 project led - Downs to the sea)	Selection of training provider; agree timeframe for recruitment, set up training agreement with selected training provider; recruitment (aiming at September start date)
Embed the new applicant tracking system	New system embedded and anonymised application have been introduced	
Launch of corporate training programme	Corporate training plan rolled out with a majority of courses completed in 24/25 with some rolling over to 25/26	
Finalise and launch staff survey action plan	Complete - actions allocated and plan communicated	
Review of Induction Process	Review underway and will be launched early 25/26. New probationary guidelines introduced and received positive feedback	
Next steps to embed Inclusive Leader and Teams EDI training	Presentation given at all staff meeting in December by training provider. All new starter required to complete training during induction. This work is on-going and will roll over to 25/26	
Review recruitment process and put in measures to attract more diverse applicants	Paper submitted to P&R in Feb to present work completed and further review in 25/26. Some new initiative introduced are: Applicant Tracking System that processes anonymised CVs. Gender and ethnicity checking of language in adverts. Training in place to challenge unconscious bias	Review of recruitment page on website. Review of interview process to ensure inclusive and accessible

Compliments, Comments and Complaints Summary 2024/2025

Compliments

The Compliments, Comments and Complaints (CCC) panel have high standards of expectation in relation to reviewing submitted compliments. Compliments included in the recorded data reflect services provided above the expected day-to-day function of an Officers' role. In all instances, the CCC panel ensure line managers and Officers are informed of any feedback received.

Complaints

The number of complaints received this year (41) show little variance from the figure reported in 2023-24. The total number of planning complaints continues to represent a very small percentage of the business transacted by the planning team (in excess of 4700 applications handled during the year).

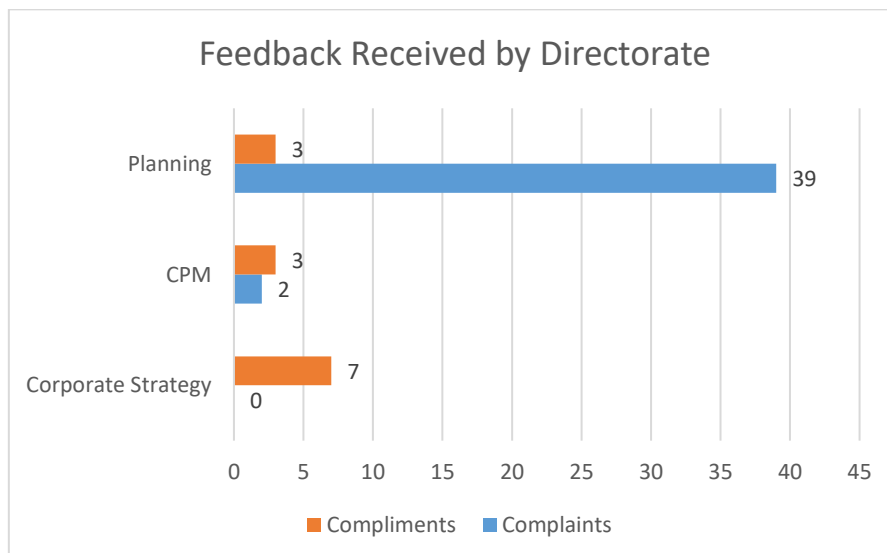
There was a drop in the number of complaint responses being issued within the target time during the 2024-25 reporting period, down to 56% from 63% in 2023-24. It is important to note that the SDNPA complaints policy allows for an extension of time to be agreed with the complainant, this enables more complex cases to be thoroughly investigated prior to a response being issued.

It is fair to say that over the last year there has been an increase in the nature and complexity of complaints received. The recorded complaints data cannot capture the number of communications, both written and verbal, that are often received by the responding officer during the consideration of a complaint response.

The new complaints policy, which came into use on 1 April 2025, streamlines the complaints process and consequently the length of time for a complaint to be processed through all stages of the process will be reduced.

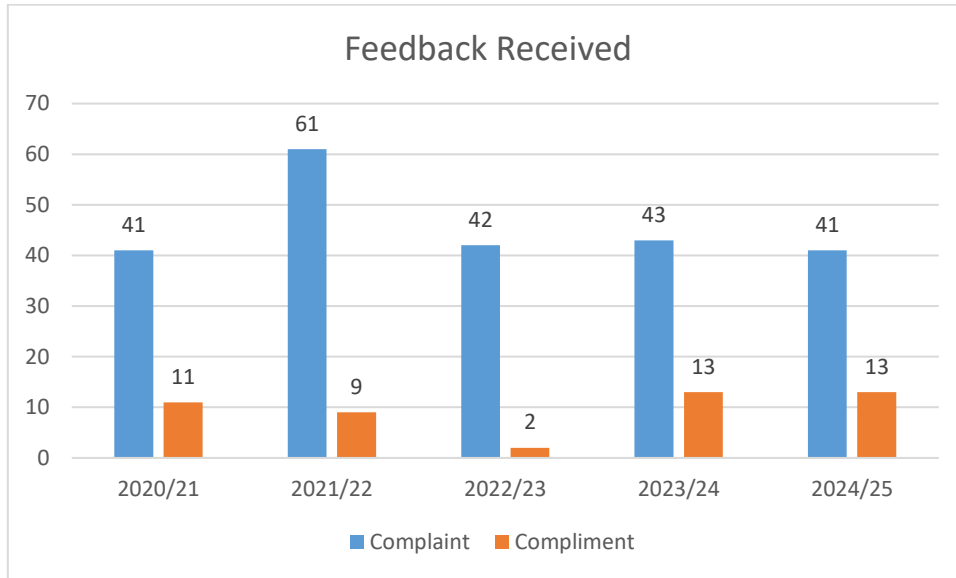
Feedback Received by Directorate 2024-25

Directorate	Number of Complaints	Number of Compliments
Corporate Strategy	0	7
CPM	2	3
Planning	39	3



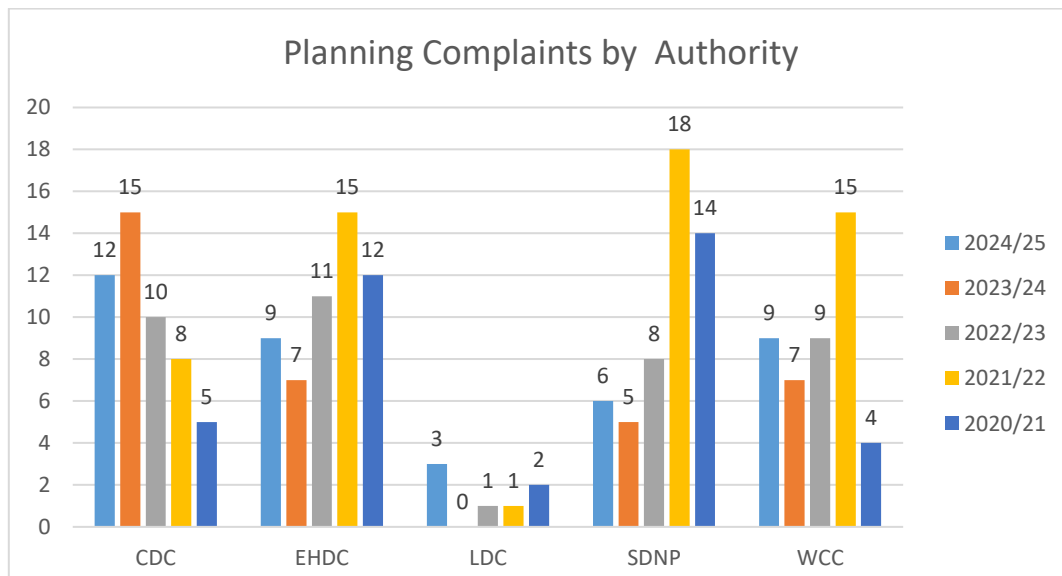
Feedback Received – 5 Year Comparison

Reporting Year	Number of Complaints	Number of Compliments
2020/21	41	11
2021/22	61	9
2022/23	42	2
2023/24	43	13
2024/25	41	13



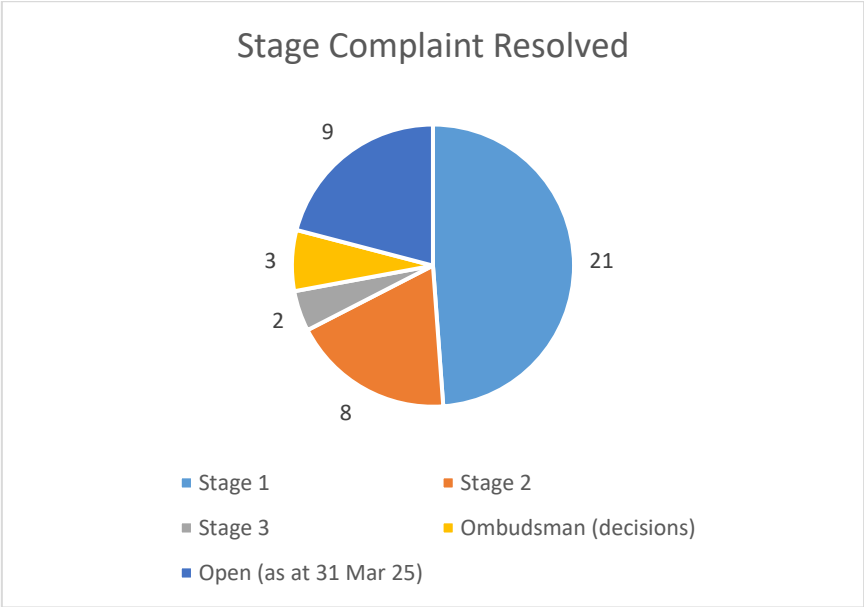
Planning Complaints by Authority

	Valid Applications	Major Apps	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
CDC	1394	10	12	15	10	8
EHDC	883	1	9	7	11	15
LDC	768	0	3	0	1	1
SDNP	1172	37	6	5	8	18
WCC	569	2	9	7	9	15
Total	4786	50	39	40	41	61



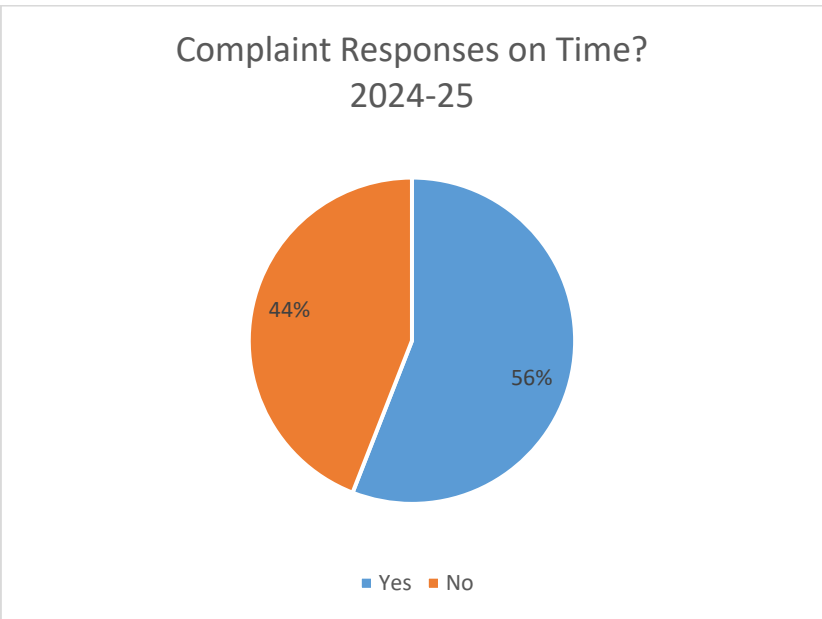
Stage Complaint Resolved 2024-25

Stage Resolved	Number of Complaints
Stage 1	21
Stage 2	8
Stage 3	2
Open (as at 31 March 25)	9
Ombudsman (decisions received)	3



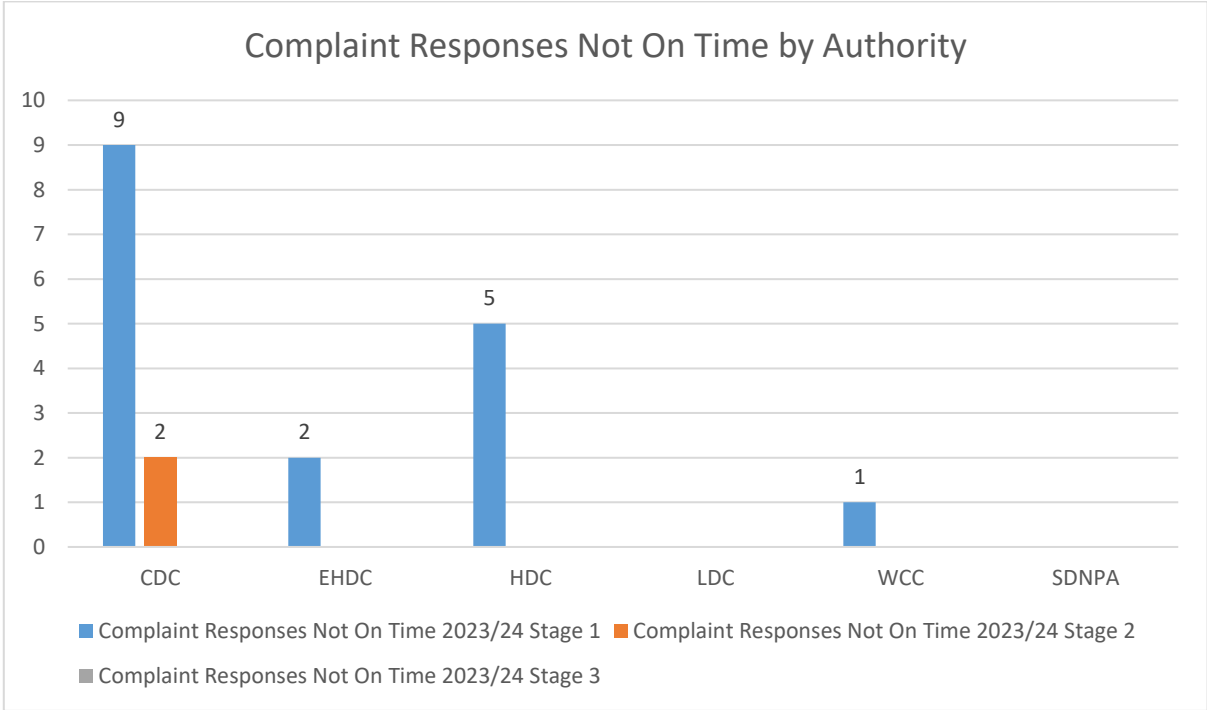
Percentage of Complaint Responses sent within time 2024-25

Yes	No
56%	44%



Complaint Responses not on time by Authority

Authority	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
CDC	6	4	
EHDC	3	0	
LDC	3	1	
WCC	3	2	
SDNPA	0	3	1



SDNPA Complaints – Ombudsman Decisions 2024-25

Ombudsman Reference:	24 015 770
Ombudsman Decision:	Closed after initial enquiries
Decision Date:	27 January 2025

The Complaint

- A case was brought against the Authority in relation to their handling of three of the complainants' planning applications. Two had been appealed, a third experienced long delays.

Ombudsman's Conclusion

- The Ombudsman commented that they were unable to investigate as the complainant had already used their right to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate for two of the applications raised.
- The Ombudsman commented, in response to the matter of the third application and the delay caused by the Authority calling in the application, that it could have been appealed for non-determination after eight weeks. They were also satisfied that the Authority had explained the reason why it had been necessary to call the application in.
- The Ombudsman concluded that they would not investigate as there had been opportunity to appeal to the Planning Inspector and the complainant had not suffered insignificant injustice to the remaining issues.

Ombudsman Reference:	24 009 762
Ombudsman Decision:	Closed after initial enquiries
Decision Date:	6 November 2024

The Complaint

- A case was brought against the Authority and their failure to provide clear pre-planning application advice for over a year, and that the Authority had; lied in relation to the statement that applications are dealt with in chronological order, refused to answer queries and required changes to proposals without reason, refused to consider supporting evidence and broke promises to work proactively.

Ombudsman's Conclusion

- The Ombudsman concluded that the complaint had been made late given that the Authorities response to his pre-planning application advice was provided in late September 2022. They saw no reason why the complaint couldn't have been raised much sooner.

Ombudsman Reference:	24 012 336
Ombudsman Decision:	Closed after initial enquiries
Decision Date:	6 November 2024

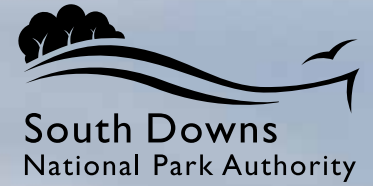
The Complaint

- A case was brought against the Authority relating to the application of planning policy in relation to a neighbouring dwelling and that the Ombudsman should correct the Authority's planning policy to prevent policy from being misinterpreted.

Ombudsman's Conclusion

- In their assessment the Ombudsman commented that no significant injustice had been caused due to the refusal/withdrawal of the planning applications.
 - The Ombudsman advised that as they were not a planning expert, matters relating to planning decisions or planning policy should be considered by the Planning Inspectorate.
 - The Ombudsman concluded that the complaint could not be investigated as it was a matter for the Planning Inspector, there was insufficient injustice caused, and the matter was out of time.
-

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**.

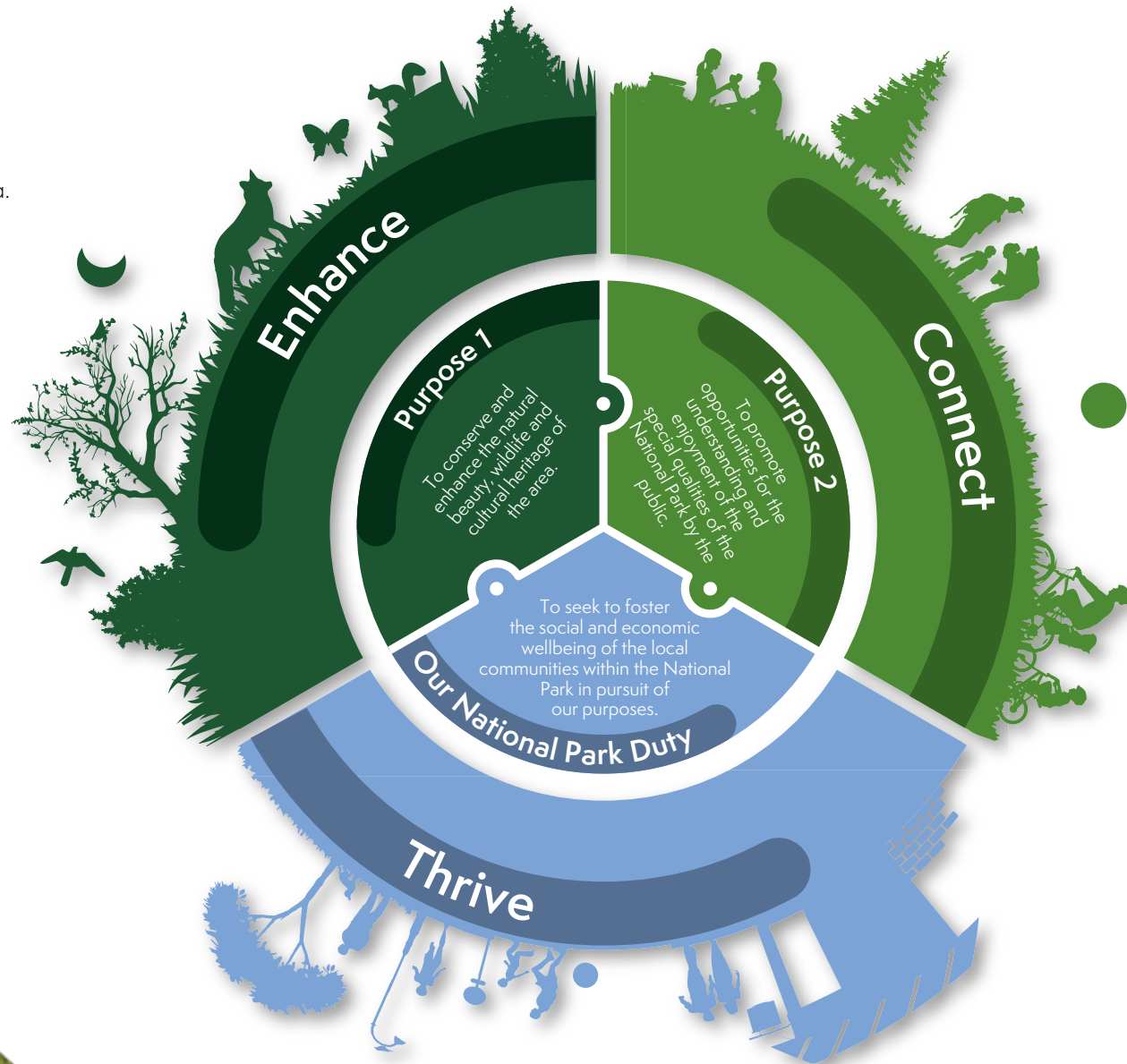


THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH WE WORK

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.

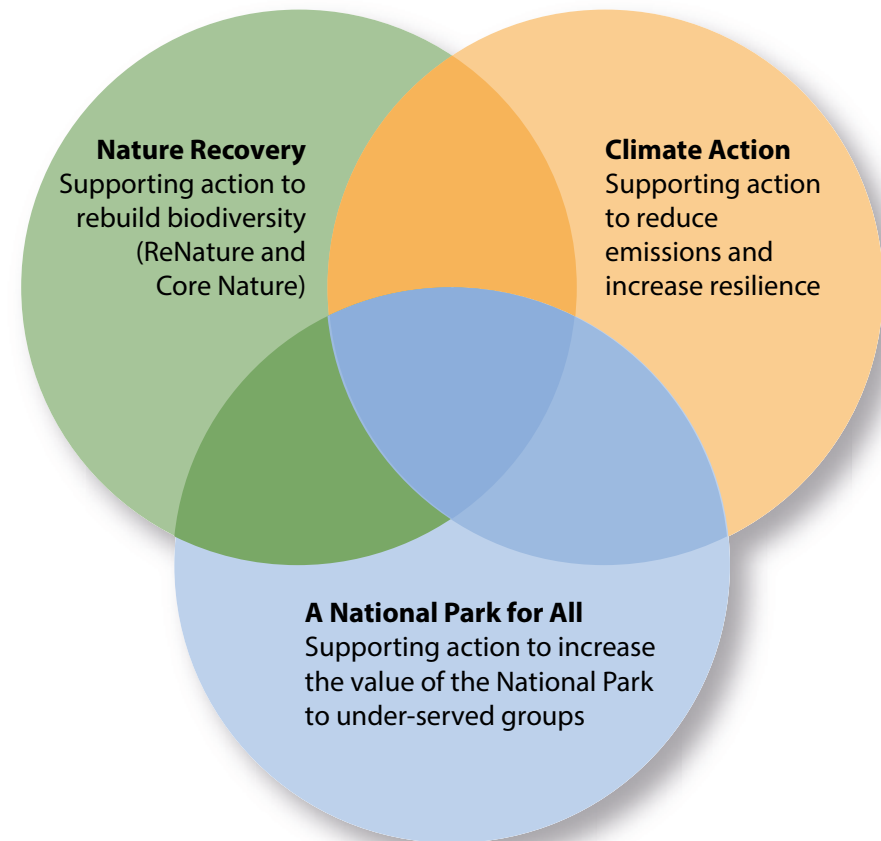
The South Downs National Park Authority's **Corporate Plan** sets out how we will deliver those elements of the South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan for which we are responsible.

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.

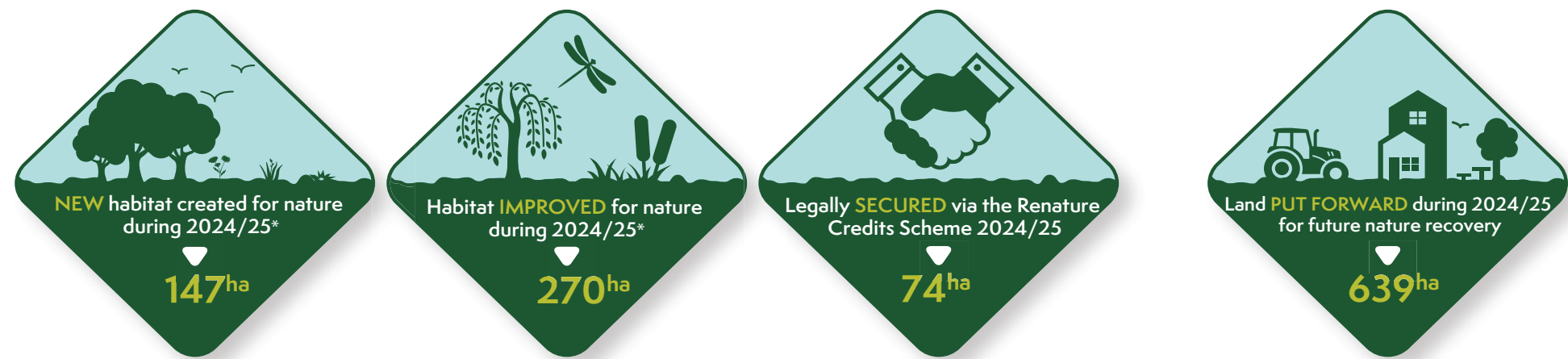
SEVEN SISTERS
SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

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.



© SDNPA

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

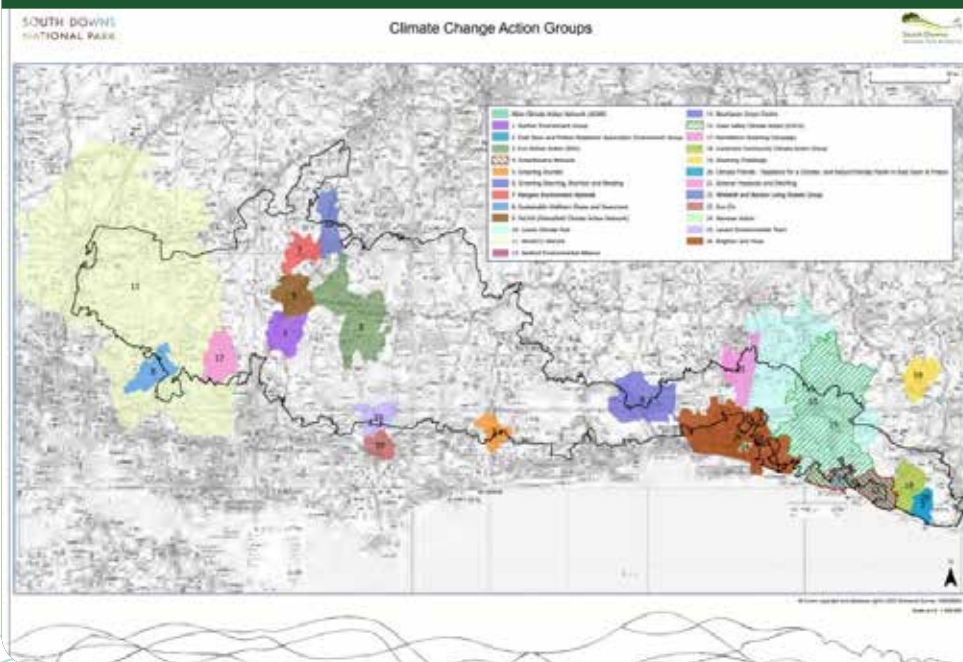
We have funded a community energy co-operative, Energise South Downs, to deliver these workshops which help people understand the energy demand in their local area and provides an opportunity for people to have an informed discussion about the benefits of localised, renewable energy provision. By understanding 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."



CASE STUDY: CLIMATE ACTION MAP/ KNOWLEDGE HUB NETWORK

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 (annual or total to date??)
H6.1 Number of people from under-represented groups engaged through our engagement and project activity	Increase on 2023/24 (1,389)	6,962	●
H6.2 Number of engagement activities targeted at underrepresented audiences	30	331	●

KPI	Annual 2024/25 Target	Actual achieved 2024/25	RAG Status (annual or total to date??)
H7.1 Number of sessions facilitated by mobility equipment	100 sessions	117	●
H7.2 Metres of new and/or improved accessible path	No target	6,245	N/A
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	No target	4,789	N/A

KPI	Annual 2024/25 Target	Actual achieved 2024/25	RAG Status (annual or total to date??)
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=nx10n4S-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:

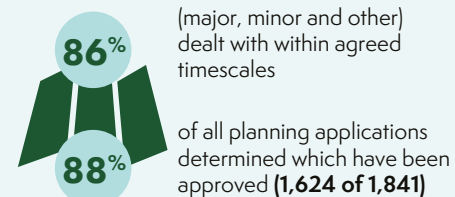
- £200k on Bury School (classroom extension)
- £130k on Egrets Way (Phase 6)
- £50k to Petersfield Open Air Swimming Pool (to upgrade changing rooms)
- £50k to HCC for their 'Hampshire pollinators project'
- £50k to Buriton for their village hall improvements

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

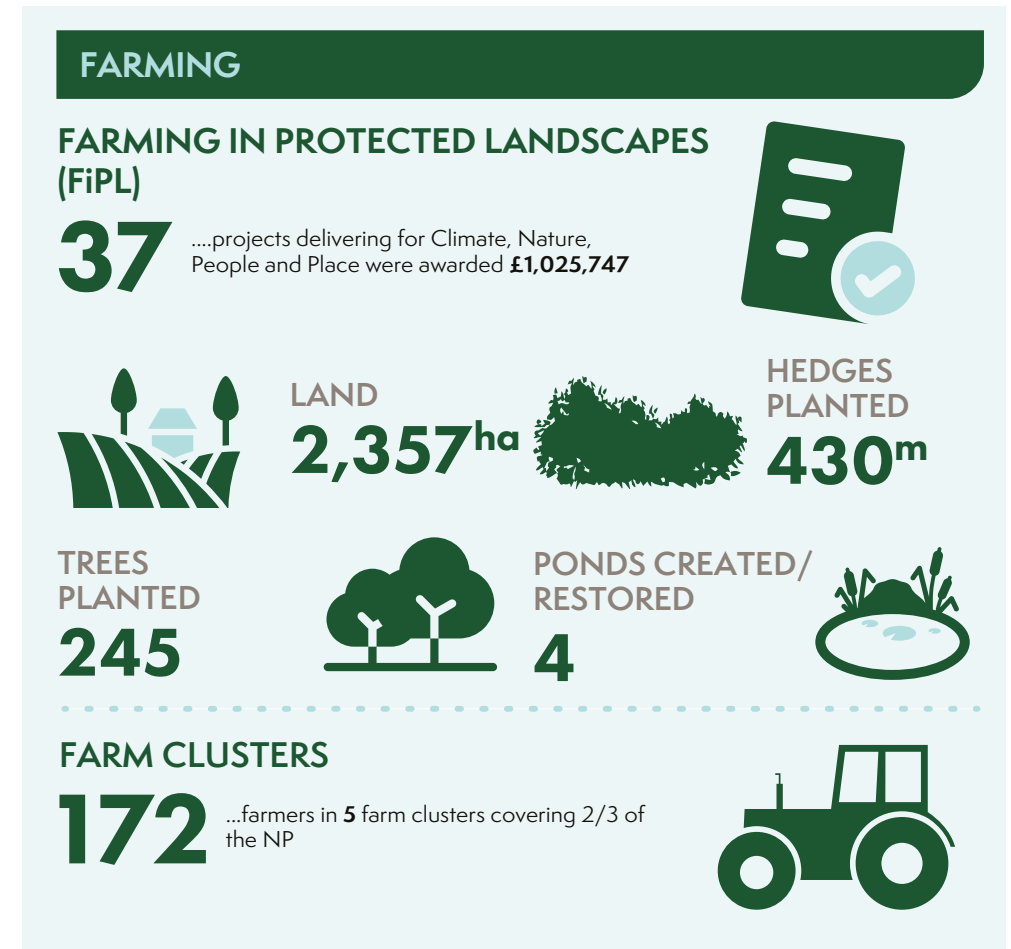
In 2021, the Farming In Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme was announced by Defra to help support farmers in England's 44 protected landscapes.

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.



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.



© Rachel Remnant

- 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:

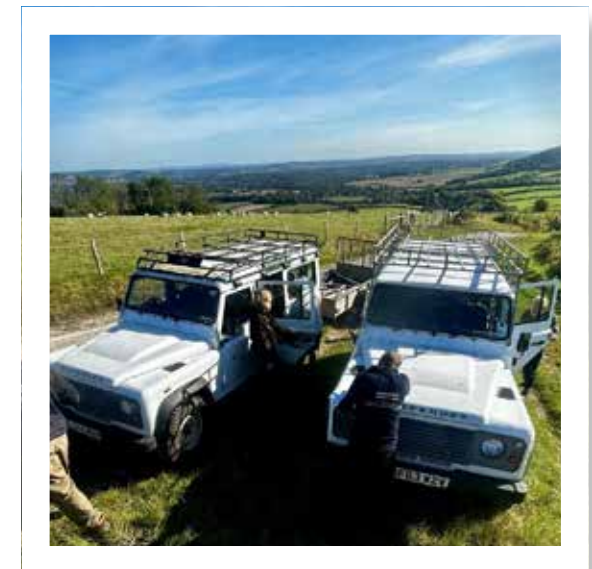
SOUTH DOWNS WAY MAINTENANCE

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



© SDNPA / Paul Busnell

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.

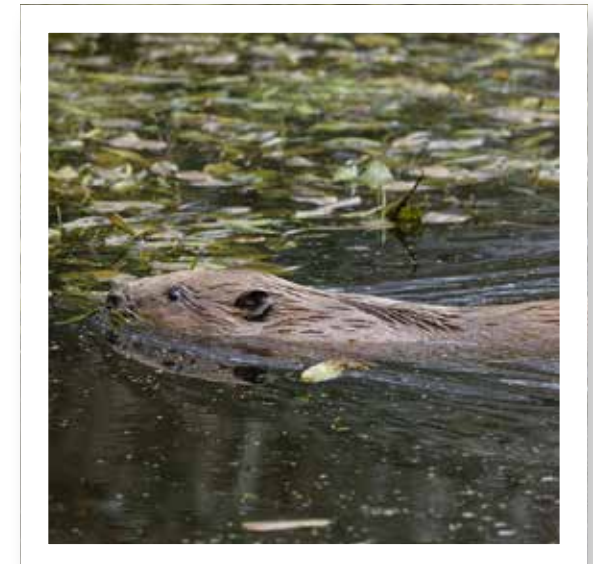
We began exploring the possibility of assisting the landowner with a FiPL funding application and sought to engage the local community through a public consultation process. After working with an external consultancy and preparing material in house, we attended a local fair, the Parish Council's Annual 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



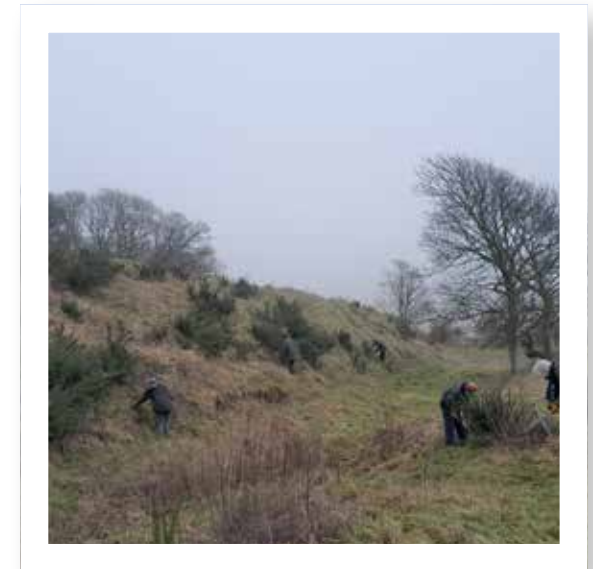
© National Trust

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



© SDNPA

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.



© SDNPA

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



© SDNPA

HOW THE AUTHORITY IS FUNDED

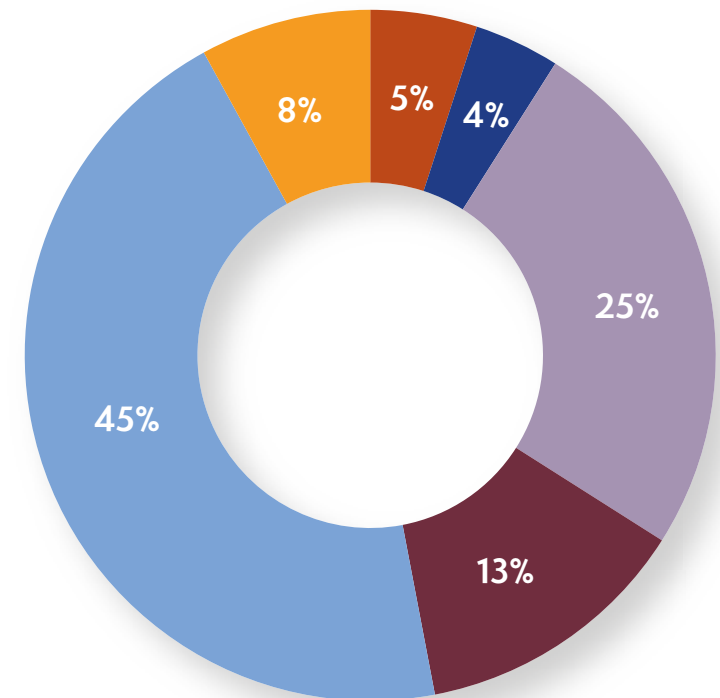
The main source of funding, for all National Park Authorities, is a National Park Grant from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). In 2024/25 the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) received a grant totalling around £10.7 million.

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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)**



SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

South Downs Centre
North Street
Midhurst
West Sussex
GU29 9DH

T: 01730 814810

W: southdowns.gov.uk

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