

ANNUAL REVIEW 2020/21



ANOTHER YEAR OF CHANGE IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

National Parks were created as the nation's breathing spaces – stunning world-class landscapes with the power to inspire everyone and replenish the soul.

Never before has this quality been more important than the past year.

With all our communities, both within and outside the South Downs National Park, dealing with the daily challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, this beautiful “green lung” for the South East has been a lifeline of escape, restoration and recovery.

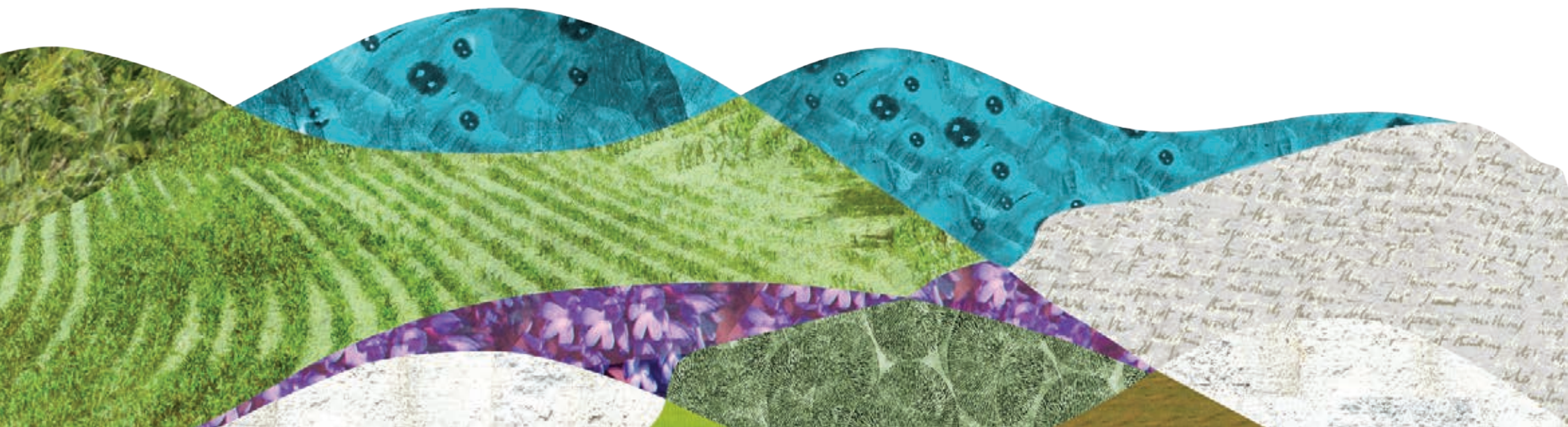
One of the true positives to come from this testing time has been the renewed wave of interest in connecting with nature and the very vital role green spaces play for our health and wellbeing.

As an Authority, we have had to respond and adapt quickly – fully recognising our important role as a major stakeholder across Sussex and Hampshire to play our part in helping communities recover.

Central to this task, and a measure taken early on in the pandemic, was the creation of a COVID-19 Recovery Fund.

A total of 66 projects across the National Park have so far benefitted from a share of more than £295,000. This funding has helped to support a myriad of projects, including helping to give people improved access to the countryside, supporting our amazing cultural heritage venues, small businesses and rural economy.

The important day-to-day work of the Authority has gone on, conserving and enhancing this treasured landscape with the aim of making the South Downs a better place for both nature and people. Our on-the-ground work from rangers, planners and staff has continued this year, albeit without the usual 3,742 days of volunteer work we so hugely benefit from. The impressive biodiversity figures we usually report on in this report such as the 126 chalk grassland, woodland, heathland and river sites maintained and enhanced, has been impacted due



to Covid-19 this year but restrictions lifting should allow us to pick up again in 2021-22.

The diversity of our work has been significant – whether it be helping to plant 10,000 trees across the South Downs, facilitating the creation of new life-giving dew ponds, delivering enforcement action to protect the landscape, or laying the groundwork to help young people access outdoor learning opportunities.

It was also the year where virtual engagement ascended to new heights of importance. Our virtual festivals and content, inspiring people about this wonderful place, reached tens of thousands of people, many of them new audiences who may not have connected with the South Downs National Park before. We enter the next year with a strengthened digital offering, while fully appreciating the very real need for face-to-face engagement and the fact that nothing quite beats taking in the views and experiencing this remarkable landscape for yourself!

Important strategies came to the fore this year, not least the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the launch of The People and Nature Network (PANN). The PANN partnership strategy, covering the South East region, aims to create a connected network of green infrastructure that makes havens for wildlife, supports local economies, helps to mitigate climate change and gives local people all the health and well-being benefits of a better natural environment. An ambitious vision indeed, but a strong framework for change.

We hope the strategy will inspire and help create a better future for us all. Now truly is the time for nature and everyone can play their part in nature recovery. This will be demonstrated by our acquisition of the Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) from East Sussex County Council. Progress on delivery of our aspirations at SSCP will feature heavily in the Annual Review next year

I do hope you enjoy reading this Annual Review, which shines a spotlight on the breadth of our work over the past year and the important commitments we have made.

Celebrating the strength, innovation and resilience of the National Park, the Authority, our partners and our communities, this Annual Review shows we are ready to meet the future with courage and determination.



Ian Phillips
Chair



Trevor Beattie
Chief Executive

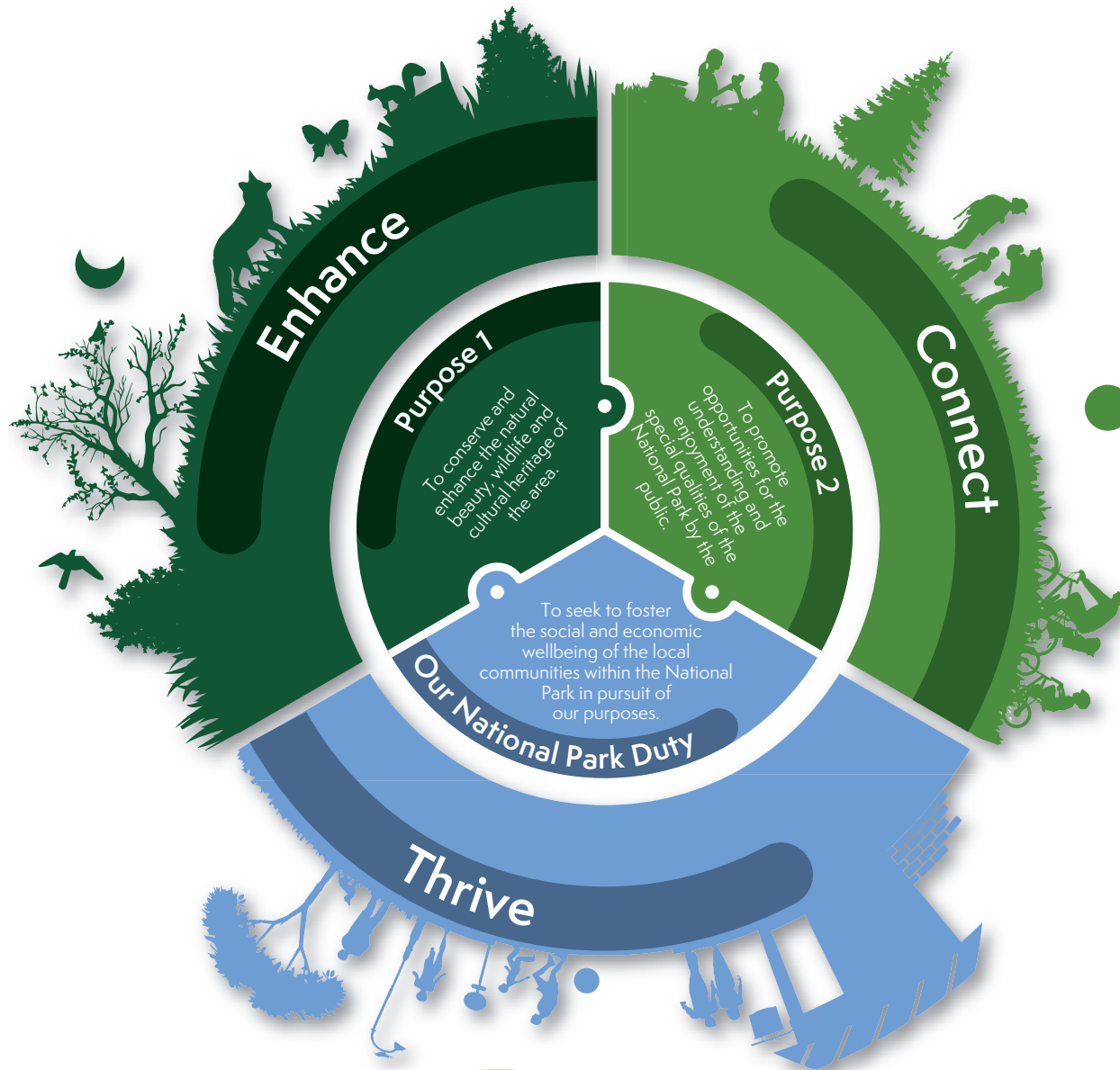
This Annual Review highlights some of our key achievements for 2020/21 which link to the objectives laid out in our **Corporate Plan 2020/21**

Cover image: © SDNPA – Long man of Willmington



OUR PURPOSES AND DUTY

Our role as the National Park Authority is clearly defined by Parliament in our statutory Purposes and Duty, which are:

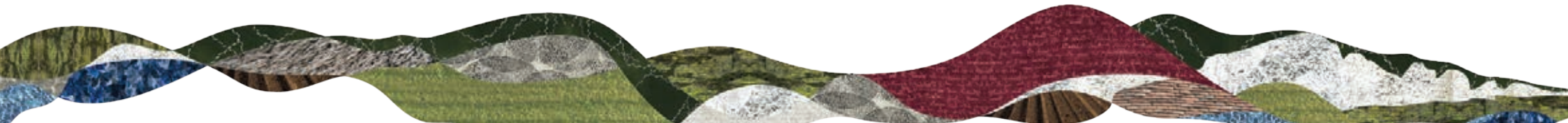
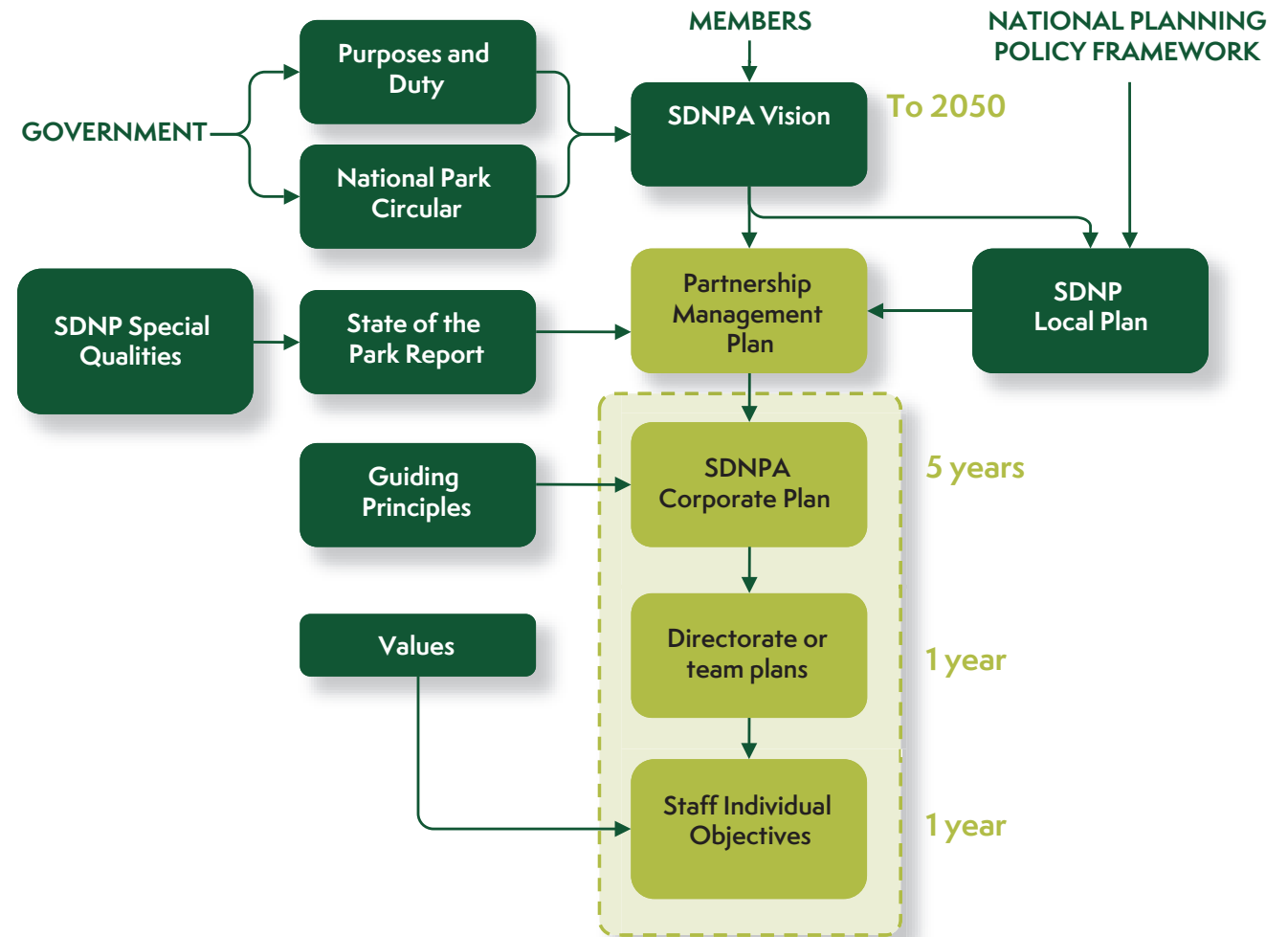


THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH WE WORK

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

The Corporate Plan is one of our key management tools to ensure delivery of our Purposes and Duty.

Progress towards demonstrating that we have delivered the success measures will be monitored by the South Downs National Park Authority annually and published in the **Annual Review**.



SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK KEY ACHIEVEMENTS FROM 2020/21

Over 10,000 trees delivered to 26 different sites

10,040



TREES FOR THE DOWNS

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

400m

...of hedge planted south of Kingley Vale.

WOODLAND

28

Site visits with woodland owners covering 1,100 ha

CULTURAL HERITAGE COLLECTIONS AT RISK SCHEME

10 GRANTS



benefitting 14 museums and heritage organisations in the National Park

OUTSIDE LEARNING

29

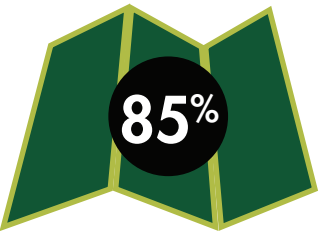
Online teacher training sessions



Supporting > 1000 teachers taking learning outside

PLANNING APPLICATIONS


85%



(major, minor and other) dealt with within agreed timescales

COVID-19 RECOVERY FUND

66





...projects funded, supporting jobs, small businesses and the rural economy

ALONG THE SOUTH DOWNS WAY

>38 maintenance issues were resolved, including:

- 10km** of surface vegetation clearance
- 550 metres** ...of track resurfacing at three separate locations

318

sign-ups for John Muir Award e-newsletters




31 families and 4 individuals awarded



AFFORDABLE HOUSING

22%

...of homes built in the National Park



SOCIAL MEDIA REACH



57,455

Total social media followers up 46%

WEBSITE VISITORS



1.5million

unique visits up 208%

8,078

E-NEWSLETTER SIGNUPS TO DATE



3 VIRTUAL EVENTS

(Wild Chalk, Secrets of the Heath and Dark Skies Festival) with a reach of more than...

500,000



RURAL ECONOMY

452

...entries on new 'Connecting our Communities' map



CASE STUDY: A DIFFICULT YEAR: HOW THE AUTHORITY RESPONDED TO COVID-19

In early 2020, it became clear that local organisations and businesses would be severely affected by the pandemic and National lockdown restrictions. As a direct response, the South Downs National Park Authority launched a 'recovery' fund that was open to application from those seeking support to modify their offering to improve overall financial resilience, or to fund important work during this unprecedented time.

The funding was split into five priority themes: landscape and biodiversity, cultural heritage, sustainable access, connecting people and communities, and economy and tourism, with an additional, smaller amount going towards engaging more people with the National Park.

Applications were welcome for projects that would use the money to benefit those within or visiting the National Park.

In total, 66 projects received funding from a variety of organisations from different sectors, though all were based within the National Park. The total funding amount awarded was £295,699.75. The main themes supported were health & wellbeing, cultural heritage, access, outreach, education sustainable economy & tourism plus landscape and biodiversity.

Some examples of recently completed projects that received funding include:

LORICA TRUST

Lorica Trust works with vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, (aged 5-18) who are at risk of exclusion or struggling with mainstream education or the effects of lockdown.

In a land-based context, alongside livestock, horticulture and bushcraft opportunities, Lorica



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Trust helps young people to build confidence, self-esteem, employment skills and well-being.

Many more young people needed support this year, especially 5-12 year olds, many of whom required 1:1 intervention support.

Many also presented with multiple challenges and suffered from significantly increased anxiety and unwillingness to engage with the outside world. This heightened more so through the Covid 19 pandemic.

CEO Jean Rolfe Lorica Trust:

"Thank you so much to the SDNP – your contribution has helped us create additional safe and secure land-based spaces for very vulnerable and disadvantaged young people – you have helped us support greater numbers of young people safely whilst at the same time facilitating the creation of new, exciting and vibrant learning spaces – thank you for having the confidence in us and in helping us to make such a difference to those that need it most"

WILDWOOD

WildWood make charcoal for BBQs and Artists using coppiced wood and forestry thinning using a machine called an 'Exeter Retort'. The equipment was old and faulty and no longer able to produce charcoal so in order for WildWood to continue trading, existing machinery needed to be replaced. The funding helped to purchase a new Exeter retort in order to ensure the survival and future growth of the business. Sales of charcoal during 2020 skyrocketed due to good weather paired with Covid-19 restrictions on travel resulting in people spending more time at home and taking part in artistic hobbies.



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STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1:

Enhance

Develop strategies and support or lead strategic overarching partnerships and projects that deliver the first Purpose of National Parks: **to conserve wildlife, the natural beauty of the landscape and cultural heritage**. Outcomes 1-4 in the Partnership Management Plan 2020-25

Despite an extremely challenging year, we have continued to work with a variety of partners to deliver key outcomes which conserve and enhance the landscape, biodiversity and heritage assets in the South Downs National Park (SDNP). We are also managing the impacts of large-scale and cumulative small-scale developments. Progress against some of our key priorities as laid out in the Corporate Plan are summarised below:

WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO IN OUR CORPORATE PLAN	WHAT WE HAVE DONE
Develop and agree the Climate Change Action Plan with the National Park Authority and partners	Three projects in the Climate Change Action Plan were started in 2020/21: The Community Energy Pathway (will complete in 2021/22), Carbon Baseline for the National Park Area (this is now completed), and the Parish Level Carbon Budget work (will complete in 2021/22)
Publish the South Downs Green Infrastructure (GI) Framework, now known as the People and Nature Network (PANN), and implement a programme of work	A clear programme of work is now in place for Nature Recovery (NR), being led by the Nature Recovery Working Group. This includes: developing a vision for NR in the National Park; assessing scope for NR by Landscape Character Assessment (LCA); understanding and defining the Authority's role with respect to Delivery Mechanisms; developing the South Downs Biological Monitoring Framework and developing a Campaign.
Roll out the 'Footsteps App'	Progress on this project was severely impacted by Covid-19, however we have identified organisations who may benefit from inclusion on the app platform and are developing additional content. The app will be launched in Spring 2021 at Pallant House Gallery and Gilbert White House.



OUTCOME 1: LANDSCAPE & NATURAL BEAUTY

CASE STUDY

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT (LCA)

As a landscape designation, an understanding of the landscape character of the National Park is central to our work. Landscapes are not static and can see significant changes in land use or land management practices over time. In some cases, the nature of that change has the potential to adversely affect the National Park and its special qualities. It is important that we are able to manage this change and maintain the unique characteristics that define the landscapes of the South Downs.

Having an up-to-date Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is the primary means to achieve this.

It provides a consistent way to identify, map and describe distinctive landscape character areas. It also describes key characteristics and sensitivities to change that may exist within these specific character areas. It is an important tool to support decision making, particularly in terms of planning and development control.

The previous LCA for the National Park was produced in 2006. Though 'state of the art' at the time, the format had become very dated. It pre-dated the routine use of GIS mapping and the move towards on-line mapping information. This was a significant limitation in terms of making it available to a wider audience. We wanted to make the LCA more accessible, interactive and readily and easily used by everyone.

Working with Land Use Consultants (LUC) we updated the assessment, and developed an on-line platform. This was based on a 'story-map' approach that is both interactive and easy to use. It makes a wealth of detail available – with new descriptive content and imagery to illustrate key landscape characteristics and sensitivities.

The new platform went live in October 2020 – and extra elements have been added since. We have recently included a new web-link to our previous work on iconic and important views in and around the National Park – the Viewshed Study. This includes the ability to access panoramic views at key locations across the Park.

Link to the LCA landing page is [here](#):



OUTCOME 2: INCREASING RESILIENCE

CASE STUDY

BIODIVERSITY AND WATER

The decline in Biodiversity is now high on the National agenda. In the Defra '25 Year Plan', there are targets to achieve a growing and resilient network that is richer in plants and wildlife and the emerging environment bill has a major emphasis on nature recovery. National Parks will be the backbone for a national nature network.

Linked to this is the water environment, wetland habitats and the importance of rivers as blue/ green corridors. Defra have a target to return at least three quarters of our waters to be close to their natural state, this will involve the restoration of natural river systems and improved water quality.

There are also clear links between biodiversity and the water environment and other priority areas such as nature based solutions in support of climate change adaptation and networks for people and nature.

SUCCESSSES

- The work of both The Aquifer Partnership (TAP) and Channel Payments for Ecosystem Services (CPES) projects, which continue to trial new approaches to land management such as regenerative farming, bring benefits through reduction in nitrates and pesticides and increased carbon storage in soils.
- The development of a biodiversity monitoring framework for the South Downs and emerging work on a delivery plan for wildlife.
- The production of a guide to Natural Flood Management, which offers advice to land managers with interventions that, will benefit communities and create more natural wetland systems.

CHALLENGES

The biggest challenge for any organisation in these work areas is resources, the dedicated resource for developing and implementing work on the ground and the finance to facilitate this.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Partnerships are vital to delivering these important areas of work. The catchment partnerships have representation from a wide range of organisations including water companies and the Environment Agency. Whilst Nature recovery involves many organisations from Local Nature Partnerships to land managers.

NEXT STEPS

- Finalising the Wildlife delivery plan for the South Downs.
- Implementing the recommendations for monitoring of biodiversity.
- In partnership to develop clear strategies for restoration of the river catchments within and flowing through the National Park
- Implementing projects such as the restoration of dewponds and chalk stream headwaters.



© 2020 Vision

OUTCOME 3: HABITATS AND SPECIES CASE STUDY

WOODLAND

As the most wooded National Park in England and Wales with 23% coverage, the South Downs has a rich and diverse mix of woodland types. Half of this is designated as ancient semi-natural woodland.

Unfortunately, tree disease, such as Dutch Elm Disease and Ash Dieback, are having a huge impact by changing the treescape of the National Park. Climate change is also bringing a new set of challenges.

SUCCESSSES

- Bob Epsom, Woodland Officer, engaged with 28 new landowners, covering 1,100 hectares of woodland.
- As part of those site visits 100ha of Plantation on Ancient Woodland sites (PAWS) were visited and assessed last year, totalling 292 hectares for the whole project (target is 500ha before June 2023).
- 400 metres of hedge was planted to the south of Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve (NNR).
- Use of Covid Recovery to help woodland owners achieve their goals by funding three Ancient Woodland Restoration Plans and three Woodland Management Plans.
- Trees for the Downs – very successful first year with 10,040 trees delivered to 26 different sites.

CHALLENGES

Covid restrictions impacted the delivery of work programmes, mainly on those sites planned for volunteer work parties. Recruitment process also slowed. Strategy lead departed in April 2020 and new post joined at the end of November 2020. Also deliveries changed after restrictions lifted for Trees

for the Downs. The adaptability, flexibility and commitment of staff were the key to the successful completion of the first campaign.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

The Conservation Partnership (now extended to June 2023) aims to bring more woodlands into active management to improve their biodiversity and secure their future within the National Park landscape. Particular emphasis is placed on the sustainable management of ancient woodland, restoring the ecological value of PAWS, and the recording and protection of veteran trees in the South Downs.

NEXT STEPS

- Reengage with the South Downs Forestry Champions Partnership to support the delivery of its Action Plan. New partner members have been contacted. England Tree Strategy launched in May 2021 and we will be discussing with the Forestry Champions the meaning of the Strategy for the South Downs.
- The Trees for the Downs campaign is ongoing. We will be supporting the project, incorporating Bringing Elms Back to the Downs to provide efficiencies.
- Demand for Dutch Elm Disease (DED) resistant trees has been high, and during its first year, the project helped to stimulate the supply chain of disease resistant elms. Funding has been confirmed for a further two years.
- Formalise local agreement with Forestry Commission and Forestry England to meet the shared ambition, priorities and objectives set on the National Accord between Forestry Commission (England) and National Parks England signed April 2018.



OUTCOME 4: ARTS AND HERITAGE CASE STUDY

CULTURAL HERITAGE

COLLECTIONS AT RISK

The National Park Authority provided funding to support a Collections At Risk grants scheme to support museums and galleries in addressing critical issues arising as a result of Covid19, from compromised collections care, building security and insurance issues. Ten grants benefited 14 National Park museums and heritage organisations:

"We are impressed with the speed with which South Downs National Park Authority was able to approve and action the funding agreement. In terms of the partnership, we believe the liaison between the two organisations has gone well and we hope to have further opportunities to collaborate in the future."

Carolyn Chinn (Programme Manager) South East Museum Development

MAKING SENSE: CREATIVE KIT BAGS WITH TOWNER EASTBOURNE

The National Park Authority offered a funding contribution to Towner Eastbourne to support their programme of Creative Kit Bags, which provide households most impacted by the pandemic access to high quality creative experiences and opportunities to engage with the natural environment.

"The art bags from Towner are absolutely amazing. Watercolour paint palette and paper and a box of charcoal with art projects to attempt. Such beautiful quality. We will have hours of creative pleasure, tree rubbing and leaf rubbing and hopefully go out to the shoal to paint cliffs. We are thrilled. So generous. Million thanks for always thinking about us." **Waves, Seaford Family**

BUTSER ANCIENT FARM

Butser Ancient Farm have launched an innovative partnership with Operation Nightingale to construct a Bronze Age roundhouse, an initiative that uses archaeology to support the recovery of wounded, injured and sick military personnel and veterans. Ensuring that as many people as possible can benefit from the project, the partnership also includes Step Together, a charity that works with people often facing social exclusion and reduced opportunity due to a variety of factors:

"We are very grateful for the support provided by the South Downs National Park Authority to enable this exciting project to take place. Not only will it help us better tell the story of this special landscape, but also to work with some brilliant partner organisations to engage new volunteers and audiences with our heritage." **Maureen Page (Director) Butser Ancient Farm**



© Eleanor Spowith

OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS: ENHANCE

CREATING NEW HABITATS FOR BIRDS AND INSECTS

Dew ponds are oases for wildlife and a key driver for nature recovery.

The South Downs National Park Authority partnered with the Norfolk Estate on an inspiring project to reinstate a dew pond at Peppering, near Arundel.

These beautiful ponds are synonymous with the chalk grassland of the South Downs, historically being dug by farmers as a watering hole for livestock and some dating back at least a couple of hundred years. Teeming with wildlife, they provide drinking and bathing water for birds, and a home for dragonflies and other aquatic wildlife.

In fact, dewponds typically support around 70% of all freshwater species found in lowland landscapes. The wildlife value of ponds is also considerably enhanced where you have a network of them, making it easier for species to move between them, meaning populations are more resilient to local climate change. Plans are now afoot for the Authority to work with partners at creating a network of ponds in the area.

It's a great example of partnership working to give a real boost to nature. With biodiversity under threat across the world, these kind of grassroots initiatives, creating new habitat and stronger ecosystems, will make such a



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difference as part of a network of nature recovery projects.

TREE-MENDOUS EFFORT TO RESTORE OUR TREES

More than 10,000 trees were planted over the winter as part of the inspiring Trees for the Downs initiative, boosting our treescape and improving ecosystem resilience.

It followed a major fundraising campaign by the South Downs National Park Trust to raise £61,500. The public's response was beyond all expectations – meaning that thousands of iconic British tree saplings could be planted across the South Downs region and are now growing stronger by the day.

The initiative is aiming to restore trees that have been lost over the past few decades to pests and diseases, including Ash Dieback and Dutch Elm Disease. At the heart of the campaign is to restore trees that form part of people's lives – whether it be next to a popular walking route or in a school's grounds.

Able assisted by the National Park Authority's woodlands team, almost 4,000 trees were planted in the Adur and Worthing area, with 2,000 trees at Lancing Ring, 1,300 trees planted at Sheepcombe Hanger in Findon Valley and around 650 trees now in the ground at Gallops in Findon Valley.

The Trust has now set its sights on even bigger goals – raising £260,000 to plant 100,000 trees across the National Park over the next five years.



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STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2:

Connect

Develop strategies and support or lead strategic overarching partnerships and projects which deliver the second Purpose of National Parks: **to promote understanding and enjoyment and improve health and well-being through volunteering & learning, high quality access management and providing information and events.** Outcomes 5-8 in the Partnership Management Plan 2020-25.

Although much of our work was heavily impacted by Covid-19, we have continued to promote opportunities for awareness, learning and engagement, seeking to ensure quality access management and accessibility, and supporting the development of sustainable tourism. Progress against some of our key priorities as laid out in the Corporate Plan are summarised below:

WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO IN OUR CORPORATE PLAN	WHAT WE HAVE DONE
Identify Protected Landscape issues within strategic transport policies and planning in Transport for South East (TfSE) region	Examples of work undertaken this year included: feeding into TfSE Transport Strategy, Forum and Studies; joining the working groups of two TfSE studies (Future Mobility and Outer Orbital Area); responding to consultations (Rampion 2, Petworth 20mph); advising on pre-app designs for Exceat Bridge at Seven Sisters Country Park, and progressing the Communities in the South Downs (CitSD) project
Develop the 'Our South Downs' Learning Network	Due to Covid-19 our focus with schools changed to online support for teachers and education professionals. We ran a series of very well attended online teacher training courses for teachers and education professionals during Autumn Term 2020 and Spring Term 2021, supported by partners in 'Our South Downs' Learning Network.
Deliver the John Muir Award (JMA) Families Inclusion Award	This was a hugely successful initiative despite the impact of Covid-19. The team worked with the John Muir Trust to agree a revised virtual JMA programme for families. We successfully engaged 65 families in Q1, and 230 families signed up in Q4 for our Wild Winter JMA. We have adapted the JMA project longer-term to engage family groups in taster activities and JMA days rather than an entire JMA as this is a softer reintroduction to engagement and experiencing the National Park.

OUTCOME 5: OUTSTANDING EXPERIENCES

CASE STUDY

SUSTAINABLE ACCESS

The delivery of infrastructure to enable more opportunities for sustainable access to and around the National Park is a priority in the Partnership Management Plan and a key area of work for the Access Team. While the promotion of public transport as a means to access the National Park was necessarily paused during the pandemic, work to progress key walking and cycling routes has continued.

SUCCESSES

The year saw several opportunities to seek external funds to support the development of routes. A notable success came via a relatively new relationship with Highways England staff for Sussex and we were invited to bid for funds for the Egrets Way path between Lewes and Newhaven. We prepared an Economic Case in line with Department for Transport (DfT) and Highways England guidance and secured £600k for Phase 6 which we hope to complete in 2022. We also completed an Economic Case for the Centurion Way and began detailed feasibility work for a section of the Rother Valley Way.

CHALLENGES

Planned face-to-face engagement and negotiations with landowners along the Phase 5 alignment of the Egrets Way was paused during the first half of the year due to Covid restrictions inevitably affecting the delivery of this project. The eventual easing of restrictions led to an intense period of engagement and preparation of agreements and detailed documents to enable work on the ground to commence in 2021/22.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Many partner organisations have shown incredible resourcefulness and resilience in the face of the pandemic and its impact on their operating practices, finances and relationships with others.

We have been pleased to support Charleston Trust as they sought funding to improve sustainable access to the estate and we have been encouraged by members of the Rother Valley Way stakeholder-working group who have supported the feasibility work by carrying out route audits in the local area and supplying results to our consultants.

NEXT STEPS

The coming year will see the:

- Construction of Egrets Way Phase 5,
- Commencement of the next phase of the Centurion Way and
- Progression of the Rother Valley Way feasibility work.
- Resumption of activities encouraging visitors to explore the National Park by bus and train.



OUTCOME 6: OUTSTANDING EXPERIENCES

CASE STUDY

LEARNING, OUTREACH AND VOLUNTEERING

The Learning, Outreach and Volunteering team work with an extensive network of partners through the Learning and Volunteering Networks. We also directly engage with schools, colleges, voluntary groups and community organisations, and coordinate and deliver many outward facing projects including the Families Inclusion project. This public-facing approach brings fantastic engagement but the restrictions of the pandemic hit our sector extremely hard.

SUCCESSSES

Twenty-nine online teacher-training sessions were delivered through the SDNP Learning Network throughout the autumn and spring terms supporting teachers in taking learning outside in direct response to the challenges of Covid. These diverse and engaging sessions reached over 1,000 teachers through live sessions and views of the recorded sessions hosted on our website.

CHALLENGES

Group volunteering was severely impacted this year. A safety first approach was adopted following government and SDNPA guidance linked to public restrictions at each stage. This meant that sadly group volunteering was paused for a significant part of this year. Individual and paired volunteers were able to participate in volunteer activities for a significantly greater amount of time and microvolunteering really came to the forefront this year.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

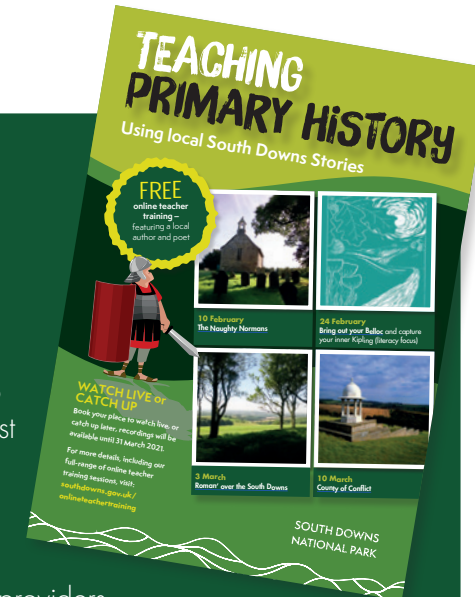
The strength of our local networks came into its own this year and enabled sharing of best practice, innovative solutions and creative ideas across the sector. This included:

1. Working with the SDNP Learning Network to survey schools and learning providers, identifying key interventions, setting up the Online Teacher training programme, sharing experiences and best practice
2. Working with the SDNP Volunteer Network to share best practice, government guidance and provide peer to peer support as well as delivering practical support and guidance to many smaller organisations on the network

NEXT STEPS

With lockdown easing we are raring to go with some exciting new initiatives to connect people with the SDNP:

- **Generation Green** – connecting young people from urban and coastal communities with the SDNP
- **Garden Classroom** – supporting a Hackney based Primary School in transition activities within the SDNP
- **South Downs Youth Action** – expanding our targeted volunteering programme for 16–25 year olds
- **Youth Voice** – expanding our Youth Ambassador volunteer numbers
- **Families Inclusion** – delivering John Muir Award taster days this summer
- **Microvolunteering** – launching the NPUK iNaturalist project here in the SDNP



OUTCOME 7: HEALTH AND WELLBEING CASE STUDY

Our aim at South Downs National Park is that the Park is a well-used and recognised asset for sustaining mental and physical health and wellbeing. We aim to achieve our work by supporting our partners to deliver against this outcome as well as promoting the Authority via our website, social media channels and through our digital content. Our focus is to empower new audiences, within and in a 10km radius of the National Park, to experience the National Park through in a variety of ways; walking, arts, cycling, connecting to nature etc.

SUCCESSSES

In 2020-21 we successfully published our Health and Well-being (HWB) strategy, which will inform our work over the next 5 years. We have also been busy making and promoting our virtual and digital content on our social media and You Tube channels. We have also supported 11 partners to deliver projects or support with health and wellbeing through our COVID Recovery Fund.

CHALLENGES

Health and Wellbeing is people relying contact with people, however due to COVID we have had limited opportunities to undertake direct face-to-face delivery hence our virtual and digital offer.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

We have worked closely with a number of partners over the last year and supported a number of projects.

Moulsecomb Forest Garden & Wildlife Project, MIND in Brighton & Hove and South Downs National Park is an example of excellent partnership working. Together the three organisations delivered a 'Connecting in Nature' programme aligned to the seasons in Autumn, Winter and Spring. Three

6-week eco therapy courses supported small groups of people, connecting with each other and nature in the beautiful wildlife garden at Moulsecomb, with a focus on personal resilience, physical and mental well-being.

'Thanks for running the group, it felt really good to be a part of and did me a lot of good to come along to. Such a lovely bunch of people and Moulsecomb Forest Garden. Thank you'

NEXT STEPS

During 2021-22 we are working in partnership with Artscape to support new audiences through our social prescribing colleagues to access the National Park through arts, heritage and green spaces. This project will focus on traditional artisan techniques and is based in West Sussex and Hampshire.

We will be focusing on our HWB webpage to promote our work as well as that of our partners.

Finally, we will be offering HWB taster sessions across the National Park to support attracting new audiences.



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OUTCOME 8: OUTSTANDING EXPERIENCES CASE STUDY

THE YEAR OF VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

The National Park Authority has always prided itself on strong engagement with its local communities – a core element of delivering our purposes and duty. The 2020 pandemic presented a new and significant challenge – how do you deliver engagement and events during a national lockdown when people are being told to stay at home?

Our engagement has always had an element of virtual delivery, but now this would be the sole method of delivery. With the National Park 10th anniversary events unable to take place, we ran a month-long online interactive quiz throughout April 2020 and more than 800 people took part. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive with many commenting that the quiz gave a much needed uplift during a very testing time.

The next mountain to climb was steep: delivering an alternative to Wild Chalk – a summer festival celebrating our chalk grassland habitat that had previously attracted several hundred people to a leafy park in Brighton.

Innovation across the Authority was required and, with this creative collaboration, **Virtual Wild Chalk** was born.

Using basic mobile phone technology for delivery, we devised an action-packed programme of virtual events over six days including five interactive Facebook lives covering “meet the sheep”, bee talks, exploring flower-rich meadows, Stone Age encounters, as well as two Instagram live colouring sessions. There were daily storytelling sessions with tales of past and present about the South Downs and a visit to a bespoke nursery specialising in growing chalk grassland flowers.

The first online festival of its kind for UK National Parks, Wild Chalk 2020 had a content reach of over 177,000, providing a welcome escape from the pandemic and inspiring people to care for this unique habitat.

With winter looming and more national lockdowns expected, the Authority had to pivot to deliver the **Dark Skies Festival** – perhaps our most popular annual event that normally attracts thousands to community venues across the National Park.

The event schedule was vast. Perhaps the most popular was our astrophotography competition. Stunning images were shared throughout the festival on social media and, such was the breathtaking quality of the imagery, that the competition went viral in the media, reaching well over 10 million people, with more than 225 pieces of coverage locally, nationally and internationally.

Our assortment of pre-recorded videos and Facebook and Instagram lives were thoroughly embraced by the public. The content included planetarium shows, nocturnal wildlife walks with rangers, interviews with authors of Dark Skies books, and downloadable craft activities. Our online videos attracted over 55,000 unique views, with people across the South East, and beyond, tuning in to find out more about our amazing Dark Skies.

2020 was the year where the power of virtual engagement came to the fore. None of these learnings will be lost post-pandemic as we embrace blended events – recognising the merits of both face-to-face and virtual engagement.



OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS: CONNECT

INTRICATE SCULPTURE TRAIL IS UNVEILED

Intricate pieces of art that tell the story of the history, wildlife and people of heathlands were unveiled and provided a new experience for walkers.

The Heathlands Sculpture Trail which includes a **downloadable leaflet**, is inspired by stories from communities and draws upon sources as diverse as the poet Tennyson and a 391-year-old local map. The educational trail links seven precious heathland sites in the National Park to encourage people to visit and explore heaths in the area.

The beautiful sandstone carvings tell the story of why heaths are so important – as common land enjoyed by local people throughout the centuries and as a rich haven for biodiversity, including rare insects, birds and all 12 of Britain's native reptiles and amphibians.

The project was spearheaded by the lottery-funded Heathlands Reunited Team, working alongside the RSPB, National Trust, Hampshire County Council and Sussex Wildlife Trust.



© SDNPA

INSPIRATIONAL ART EXHIBITION LAUNCHES A YEAR ON FROM LOCKDOWN

A colourful and emotive exhibition was installed at Worthing Pier to celebrate the nourishing nature of the South Downs National Park during the pandemic.

Coinciding with the start of the first lockdown on 23 March last year, the poignant display at Worthing Pier explores people's varied relationships with the South Downs and the landscape's ability to help boost both physical and mental health.

The free exhibition, called **"The nourishing nature of the South Downs"**, was spearheaded by Creative Waves – a community arts organisation based in Worthing and Adur – which received a grant from the National Park Authority's Covid Recovery Fund.

The exhibition will be in place at Worthing Pier throughout the summer of 2021.



© SDNPA/Anne Purkiss

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3:

Thrive

Develop strategies and support or lead strategic overarching partnerships and projects which deliver the Duty of National Parks: **to build sustainable communities which are engaged and shaping their environment and supporting sustainable businesses and tourism**. Outcomes 9-10 in the Partnership Management Plan 2020-25

We are continuing to provide information and support to help communities better understand their environment and the impact of their actions on it, as well as making sure they are engaged in the design and development of their local surroundings. We are supporting the growth of sustainable local businesses. Progress against some of our key priorities as laid out in the Corporate Plan is summarised below:

WHAT WE SAID WE WOULD DO IN OUR CORPORATE PLAN	WHAT WE HAVE DONE
Participate in the development of the Petersfield Place Making Strategy	The Petersfield Place Making Strategy Board was set up and received the East Hampshire Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and the Petersfield Cycling Group Active Travel report. These documents informed the development of the Petersfield Place Making Action Plan. The Action Plan prioritised a series of projects to be progressed in the near future as a first step in delivering the place making strategy.
Effectively and efficiently operate all processes and systems for incoming and outgoing monies related to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 legal agreements	We opened the 'call for projects' for the 2020/21 CIL spend (closing date was 31 Jan 2021). £61,064.75 of CIL funding was paid directly to 13 Parishes. Over 400 projects are being assessed for inclusion on the 2021 IBP (i.e. spending of 2020/21 CIL Receipts). We collected £216,741.31 of Section 106 money and spent £143,436.92 on 11 projects. Examples of the projects funded by S106 monies include affordable housing, road and footpath improvements and improvements to a skate park.
Develop the Sustainable Economy and Tourism Engagement Strategic Approach	The Sustainable Economy and Tourism Theme Programme Board gave approval for the creation of the South Downs Enterprise Partnership (SDEP). Since securing funding in Q3, the following tasks have been carried out: 18 businesses signed up to sit on SDEP; business case and delivery plan created; scoping work for SDEP platforms (Website, Network, CRM) 90% complete with ITT due for release in April/May 2021; scoping work for SDEP Branding & Logo 90% complete with ITQ due for release in April 2021.

OUTCOME 9: GREAT PLACES TO LIVE

CASE STUDY

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES UPDATE

The South Downs National Park is home to more than 117,000 people, living in the 176 towns and villages across the National Park. A key priority for the Partnership Management Plan is to support these communities to create sustainable places where people can access vital community services and facilities and enable the delivery of affordable housing.

SUCCESSES

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The South Downs Affordable Housing grant provides funding to not-for profit organisations to support the costs of providing affordable housing in the National Park. In the past year funding of £60k has been made to Midhurst Community Land Trust to provide two new affordable homes in Midhurst. The National Park Authority's affordable housing grant will support two more Community Land Trust projects over the next year enabling the delivering of a further nine dwellings.

VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Officers have worked closely with communities across the National Park to support the provision of community facilities.

In Lewes, Section 106 funding has been used to refurbish the Play Area at Timberyard Lane in Lewes, responding directly to an aspiration in the Lewes Neighbourhood Plan to improve the provision of children's play areas in the town.

Section 106 Funding has also seen improvements to the Heath Pond in Petersfield, supported the provision of leisure facilities in Liss and make improvements to the Public Rights of Way network in Binsted.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Many of our partner organisations have continued to support local communities where they can through the pandemic. In Petersfield the Authority is working closely with all tiers of Local Government to progress the aspirations of the Petersfield Neighbourhood Plan, through the Petersfield Place Making project. The project will address a number of dangerous junctions as identified in the Neighbourhood Plan and create a more welcoming environment for cyclists and pedestrians. Funding has been provided to improve signage in the town, to ensure visitors can access all the Town has to offer.

NEXT STEPS

Support for Community Action to provide access to services and facilities in the local area, as well as an appropriate provision of open space and access to the countryside.



OUTCOME 10: GREAT PLACES TO WORK

CASE STUDY

RURAL ECONOMY AND TOURISM

Our overall objective is to promote a diverse, sustainable and dynamic economy that is positively linked to the special qualities of the National Park. The priority sectors for National Park engagement are: the Visitor Economy, Land-based industry, Food & Drink, Advanced Manufacturing and the Knowledge Economy.

SUCCESSSES

Development has commenced on the creation of a thriving business community network for like-minded businesses who positively contribute, or aspire to contribute, to the South Downs National Park.

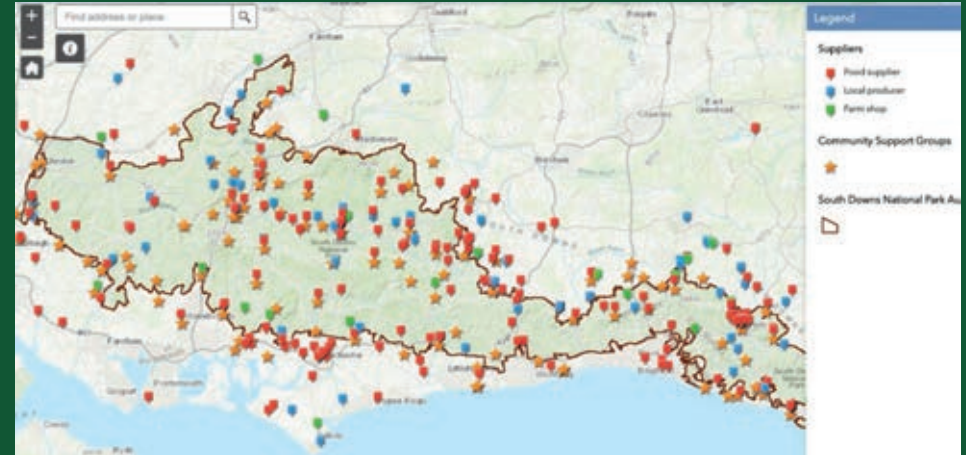
- Created and established a monthly B2B newsletter with 519 subscribers'
- Started a National Park business sustainable certification – to contribute to our Net Zero targets and develop greater social responsibility.
- Endorsed the Eastbourne Downland Whole Estate Plan (WEP), bringing the total number of WEP's endorsed in the National Park to six.

CHALLENGES

Data from the 2020 Covid-19 Business Survey showed an increase in demand from businesses for advice and support, an increase from 20% in 2019 to 54% in 2020. In response, we launched a suite of Covid Recovery Projects, complementing the work of our traditional partners, targeting our priority sectors in an attempt to help businesses survive, revive and thrive.

RECOVERY PROJECTS:

- Horticulture Pilot Project in partnership with West Sussex Growers, Rural West Sussex Partnership, Sussex Innovation Centre.



- Creation of a **SDNP Connecting our Communities Map**, with 344 business and 108 community groups, with live information on the availability of food, drink and essentials in their areas.
- Small grants were given to 22 National Park businesses totalling £32,070.00. Recovery grants given to Stansted Farm Shop and Chalk Pit Forge totalling £13,180.00.
- Working in partnership with Sussex Innovation Centre to provide IT based support to businesses within the National Park visitor economy.
- Continued alliance with Rural West Sussex Partnership.
- Delivery of a series of tourism webinars
- National Park Experiences collection (alongside 9 other English National Parks).

NEXT STEPS

The continued development of a business community and network to form a strategic framework for future engagement.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FUND (SCF) CASE STUDY

THE LIVING COAST UNDERSEA EXPERIENCE

The Beachy Head West Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) is an intertidal & near-shore MCZ, between Brighton Marina & Beachy Head. It contains some of the best examples of chalk reef habitat, with specialised communities of animals & seaweeds, including the rare short-snouted seahorse.

The MCZ sits across the boundary of the South Downs National Park (SDNP), including the Heritage Coast and part of the Seven Sisters Voluntary Marine Conservation Area and is part of The Living Coast UNESCO World Biosphere Region (TLC). SDNP & TLC's key objectives include facilitating public awareness, education & understanding to promote & encourage pro conservation behaviour to facilitate sustainable development.

In a highly populated & visited area, the MCZ offers excellent opportunities for people to engage with marine nature. However, public awareness of the MCZ status & its unique marine environment is low, due to its inaccessibility & very low profile – a Google search yields little media coverage. Public use is primarily along concrete under-cliff pathways and whilst diving is possible, costs are restrictive and waters cloudy for much of the year.

TLC Undersea Experience is **an interactive, 360 degree, Virtual Reality educational experience** enabling people to access & understand the MCZ marine environment. Users follow their curiosity to explore & learn about the environment, discovering habitats, sea creatures & underwater archaeology. They will develop a powerful, kinaesthetic understanding of the impact of tides & human behaviours, & the kinds of things everyone can do to conserve & enhance the area's natural beauty, wildlife & heritage.

Grant aided by



South Downs
National Park Authority

Sustainable Communities Fund



Brighton & Lewes Downs
UNESCO World Biosphere Region

The Sustainable Communities Fund (SCF) was pleased to support this project with an initial £7,000 grant towards equipment to pilot the community education and outreach aspect of the project with a further £2,000 towards developing the schools programme.

The Virtual Reality installation and 360degree film have been presented in a variety of arts, community, conservation and educational settings including stand-alone events (at Seven Sisters Visitors Centre, for instance), part of an event (Artpod, for example), as an attraction at a venue (National Marine Aquarium, etc.), ticketed events and schools.

The experience is 5 minutes long so 11-12 users can experience The Living Coast Undersea Experience with one headset per hour

For more information **visit**



OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS: THRIVE

PLANNING TO HELP BUSINESSES

The Authority published a key Planning Position Statement aimed at helping local businesses during the pandemic.

We identified the following sectors of the National Park to be at greatest risk under the pandemic and we will prioritise micro (fewer than 10 employees) and small (10 to 49 employees) businesses operating in these three sectors:

- Land-based industries including agriculture, forestry and fishing
- The visitor economy including visitor attractions and visitor accommodation
- The knowledge sector

The package of measures also include free pre-application advice (one meeting followed up with written advice) and, exceptionally, the waiving of monitoring fees for Section 106 legal agreements

Click [here](#) to read the Planning Position Statement in full.



© Anne Katrin Purkiss

BOOST OF OVER £1.9M FOR COMMUNITY PROJECTS

New cycling and walking routes, safe pedestrian crossings and a new community running track were among the community projects to benefit from a funding boost.

A raft of initiatives across the National Park benefitted from funds set up and administered by the SDNPA called the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), and Section 106 agreements which are paid by developers to support local infrastructure and projects.

Herne Junior School in Petersfield has installed a new all-weather 500 metre track – providing year-round opportunities for walking, jogging and running.

The facility, completed last September, has been possible thanks to £71,000 of Section 106 funding attached to the Barratt David Wilson development on land south east of The Causeway.



© SDNPA

ON THE GROUND AND GRASSROOTS PROJECTS

Relationships are fostered and developed daily between the National Park Authority and the local councils. Many of the meetings this year were held virtually as special meetings or workshops with officers joining the 176 Town and Parish councils by Zoom across the National Park. Even in these different circumstances, numerous projects were initiated together 'on the ground'. Here are just a few highlights from 2020/21:

COOKSBRIDGE AND LEWES – RAIL TO RAMBLE

Initiated through discussion between the Eastern Area ranger team, Cooksbridge Parish Council, the Access team and the Community Rail Network, two new circular walks were developed around Cooksbridge in celebration of the reinstatement of their Saturday rail service.

The starting point could be either Cooksbridge or Lewes railway stations, allowing walkers to enjoy Downland views and the winding River Ouse or to discover the historic market town of Lewes. The walking loops were designed so that they could either be completed independently or merged to form one longer route of approximately 10 miles.



© SDNPA/Charlie Hellewell

CONNECTING WITH NATURE

The landowner at Clare's Copse, near Hambledon in Hampshire, is setting up a social enterprise to host activities and outdoor experiences for adults and children allowing them to spend time in the natural environment and connect with nature:

www.re-wild.co.uk

SDNPA Western Rangers have funded and supported this project through the creation of a woodland glade, producing a useful open space to accommodate a range of activities. Tree thinning was completed along a newly established track and ash trees were cut along their length, allowing more light in, and to prevent them from becoming hazardous. The landowner will improve the ground flora by planting seed and managing the existing ivy. The impact of the work was immediate; a rewarding contribution to a local community project in the making!



Clare's Copse © Rebekah Smith

PEARL BORDERED FRITILLARY EXPLOSION AT REWELL WOOD

The Pearl Bordered Fritillary is one of many butterfly species, which have seriously declined during the second half of the 20th century. The colony at Rewell Wood near Arundel is one of four left in Sussex.

Thanks to the combined efforts of the landowner, Norfolk Estate and Central Downs rangers guided by Neil Hulme's expert advice 2020 saw the highest daily count of the butterfly, 914 compared to a highest count in 2015 of 29. Coppicing and creating bare ground where the butterflies' foodplant, violet can grow is vital if the butterfly is to thrive and colonise other woodlands nearby. The resurgence of this nationally important population demonstrates how conservation and commercial forestry can complement each other where there is the will, knowledge and key partnerships



© Simon Mockford / SDNPA

RINGMER CHURCH WILDFLOWERS

Following the success of Wildflower Lewes – a community group in Lewes that plant, manage and survey road verges around Lewes as well as other community planting, we were contacted by Wildflower Ringmer, who wanted to do the same.

It's a great opportunity to help. Anne Duke has set up Wildflower Ringmer to help create pollinator habitat in Ringmer and is inspiring the rest of the village to join her. National Park ranger Jan has been supporting her and the rest of the group to get the mowing regime changed, survey the green spaces they have and see where they can make positive changes.



© Jan Knowlson / SDNPA

SEAFORD COLLEGE CHALK GRASSLAND CREATION

By creating one hectare of new species-rich chalk grassland, this project has made a valuable contribution to nature recovery, provided a stepping-stone for species like the endangered Duke of Burgundy butterfly already present at the nearby Graffham Down wildlife reserves, and adding to the South Downs dwindling chalk grassland resource – which currently only covers 4% of the National Park.

The project will also provide a valuable learning resource for the school, with plans to use the meadow for educational



© Charles Winchester / SDNPA

activities. Surveys to monitor the success of the grassland's establishment will be carried out in summer 2021, and the intention is to engage the students with this work, inspiring them to value and conserve a critical habitat of the South Downs National Park.

This initial chalk grassland creation project will hopefully be a catalyst for further habitat creation work on the school grounds, with the potential to create a network of habitat all the way from Duncton on the eastern side of the site, to Graffham in the west – an area that would total more than 10ha of species-rich grassland.

MOVING FILM TELLS THE STORY OF BLACK TRAIL RUNNERS

The National Park Authority helped to facilitate the production of a moving film that aims to increase the inclusion, participation and representation of black people in trail running.

Filmed at Seven Sisters Country Park, the film features Simbarashe Mugomba and Rachel Dench – two key members of the Black Trail Runners and a force of inspiration for a growing number of people in black and ethnically-diverse communities who want to connect with the outdoors.



© 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 2020/21 the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) received a grant totalling around £10.5 million.

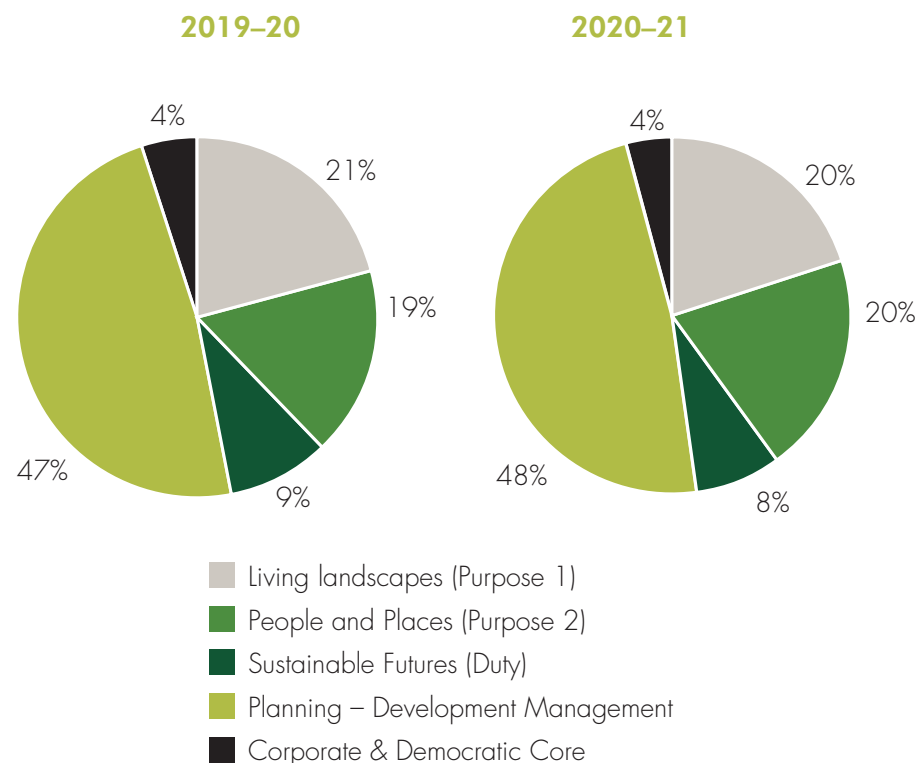
As the Planning Authority for the National Park, a significant part of our budget is dedicated to processing and determining planning applications for development. In 2020/21 the SDNPA received income of just over **£2.7 million** through planning activities (including Community Infrastructure Levy).

The SDNPA was also successful in attracting significant funding for projects to deliver the Partnership Management Plan. During 2020/21 the SDNPA received **£1.6 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 2020/21 was **£14.9 million**.

As well as the statutory duty to act as planning authority for the National Park, and the need to provide proper governance by supporting the roles of Members, Audits etc., the SDNPA spends the funds it has available in pursuit of the purposes and duty. The allocation of how those funds are spent is illustrated in the following chart:

SDNPA Expenditure



HOW THE MONEY IS SPENT

In 2020/21 **£61,064.75** of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding was paid directly to 13 Parishes. Over 400 projects are being assessed for inclusion on the 2021 Infrastructure Business Plan (IBP) – i.e. spending of 2020/21 CIL Receipts.

Also **£216,741.31** of Section 106 money was collected in 2020/21 and **£143,436.92** was spent on 11 projects.

For more details about CIL and Section 106 grants in the South Downs National Park visit: southdowns.gov.uk/community-infrastructure-levy

THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK VISION

By 2050 in the South Downs National Park:

- 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.

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 2 Action Plan 2021–22)**



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

