

Report to	South Downs Policy & Resources Committee
Date	27 June 2024
By	Countryside and Policy Manager (Eastern Downs); Strategy Lead Climate Change and Net Zero and the Performance and Projects Manager
Title of Report	Partnership Management Plan Delivery 2024-25 for Nature Recovery, Climate Change and National Park for All

Note

Recommendation: Committee is recommended to:

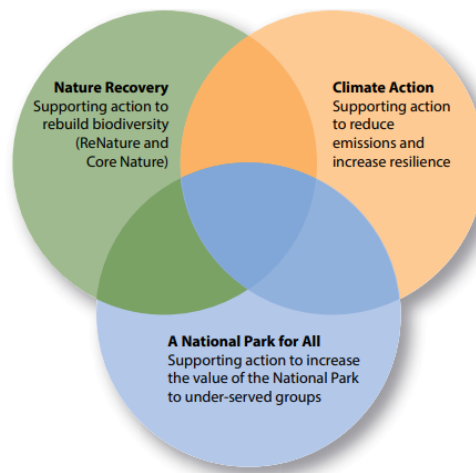
1. Note the priorities for Nature Recovery, Climate Change and National Park for All for 2024-25

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Policy and Resources Committee has terms of reference which include *to monitor and review the 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 ... Corporate Plan.*
- 1.2 The Corporate Plan Action Plan years 4 & 5 was agreed by the National Park Authority at its meeting on 11 July 2023. This report takes a forward look at the programmes of work for 2024/25 associated with each of the agreed Corporate Plan Action Plan high level targets: Nature Recovery, Climate Change and National Park for all. It complements the Annual Review, which looks at delivery undertaken in 2023-24.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 The Corporate Plan sets out how the South Downs National Park Authority will deliver the outcomes in the Partnership Management Plan for 2020-25. The long-term ambitions of the Partnership Management Plan (PMP) and the Local Plan are very broad, the Corporate Plan focuses on those areas where we know we can make the most impact against the priorities in the PMP.
- 2.2 There are three key programmes of work in the Corporate Plan Action Plan years 4 & 5 defined by High Level Targets (HLTs). This paper summarises the priority areas of work for each of the HLTs for 2024-25.



3. Issues for consideration

Nature Recovery

3.1 The Nature Recovery Programme 2024-25 sets out the programme of delivery under Corporate Plan HLT 1: To secure an additional 13,000ha, or 33% of land managed for nature by 2030 from a baseline of 25%, 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, and HLT 3: To prepare for and implement Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for the year ahead. It has been developed collaboratively across all Directorates through the Nature Recovery Working Group. It builds on the ReNature campaign launch back in 2020-21. The programme also makes an initial read across from the SDNPA HLTs to the new Protected Landscapes Outcomes Framework Targets published by Defra earlier this year. This will be subject to further refinement during the year ahead.

3.2 The programme is set out under five key work strands: Influencing Strategy, Resource Development, Action for Core Nature, Action for ReNature and Action for Species, all of which require working in partnership with land managers, partners and key stakeholders across the landscape.

3.3 **Influencing Strategy** key areas of work include:

- Contributing to the development of the new Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) introduced by the Environment Act 2021. Within the SDNP area there are three strategies under development led by the Tier 1 Authorities, or Responsible Authorities, namely Hampshire County Council, West Sussex County Council and East Sussex County Council with Brighton and Hove City Council.
- To continue working with the wider Protected Landscapes family (National Parks England, Protected Landscape Partnership, and National Parks UK) as part of NPUK Team Nature and taking forward the work under the Wildlife Delivery Plan.
- Shaping the development of the nature recovery elements of the forthcoming SDNP Partnership Management Plan review, including the requirements of 30 by 30.
- Embedding mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) within planning as well as evolving the opportunity for strategic sites for nature recovery for both mandatory and voluntary net gain.

3.4 **Resource Development** is often less visible but vitally important in enabling direct action for nature and our ability to measure success and tell the story. For example:

- Developing and managing a pipeline of possible nature recovery project ideas ready for funding opportunities as they come available.
- Improving capability to monitor and measure success through continuing to take forward the Biodiversity Monitoring Framework (Action Plan for year 4, 2024/5). In particular, the establishment of SSSI condition monitoring baseline with Natural

England, improving monitoring of key and invasive species, continuing with chalk grassland surveys and monitoring trials for hedges and ponds.

- Delivering the nature recovery communications plan 2024-25, including the Green Finance Conference and ReNature Festival.
- Continue to build and expand the variety of funding channels including a dedicated Hedgerow Fund by the South Downs Trust (SDT), explore the new National Heritage Lottery Fund Integrated Landscape Fund, and continue to develop the private finance platforms including ReNature Credits.
- Managing the Farming in Protected Landscape (FiPL) programme year 4.

3.5 **Action for ReNature** through a variety of mechanisms to achieve nature recovery at a landscape scale including:

- Taking forward key projects and initiatives such as Changing Chalk (now in its third year of delivery), Weald to Waves (including the Adur Landscape Recovery Project and possible landscape approach in the Arun), River Rother initiative (working with Arun and Rother Rivers Trust) and Downs to Sea (subject to stage 2 funding success). Also looking beyond our boundaries with projects such as Big Chalk and the Chichester Wildlife Corridors.
- Development and implementation of a South Downs Hedgerow initiative – joining up the landscape through these important corridors.
- Using the process of Whole Estate Plan development as well as implementation to realise benefits for nature.
- Taking forward green finance initiatives to secure nature-based solutions and the establishment of strategic sites for BNG.
- Working with and enabling communities to take action for nature. For example, through working with parishes, through the volunteering priorities under National Park for all and through the national “Coastal Wildbelt” initiative.

3.6 **Action for Core Nature** so to maintain, restore and enhance existing sites of biodiversity importance:

- Implementation of the Seven Sisters Country Park Countryside Stewardship Scheme (year 1).
- The Kingley Vale Protected Sites Strategy with Natural England including the Fair Game Project focused on maintaining and creating healthy woodlands.
- Working in partnership with Natural England and the other core partners towards the declaration of the Chalk Coast super National Nature Reserve.
- Ongoing Ranger work with landowners/ managers of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Local Wildlife Sites to secure favourable condition.
- Continuing to deliver the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) scheme across the Wealden Heaths which looks at minimising the impacts of disturbance on lowland heathland.

3.7 Taking forward **action for Species** through the species framework with a focus on the 4B’s: Bats, Birds, Butterflies and Bees:

- Improving the national species monitoring programmes participation within the SDNP.
- Undertaking a species abundance by habitat analysis project.
- Action through specific projects including through Area Teams and SSCP.

Climate Action

3.8 The Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2024-25 sets out the programme of delivery under 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 and HLT 5 5% reduction per annum in the overall carbon footprint of the South Downs National Park from the baseline reported in 2019. It has been developed collaboratively across all Directorates through the Climate Change Working Group. It builds on the original Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan approved by the SDNPA in March 2020, which affirmed the Authority's commitment to addressing the climate and nature emergency by:

- Setting a target for the South Downs National Park Authority to become a 'Net-Zero' Organisation by 2030;
- Agreeing to work with our constituent Local Authorities and other partners, in particular local communities and landowners, to deliver actions that respond effectively to the climate and nature emergency;
- Working towards the South Downs National Park becoming 'Net-Zero with Nature' by 2040.

3.9 The Authority has a programme of carbon reduction initiatives, to deliver HLT4, which includes updating the vehicle fleet to maximise carbon reduction. Embedding carbon reduction into procurement for goods. Work in progress to move the remaining South Downs Centre (SDC) electrical contract and all Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) electrical supply contracts to Ecotricity, the only UK based 100% renewable supplier. Works on energy efficiency projects to both the SDC and SSCP, these include replacement LED lighting, installation of new PV panels, renew the render on the 1930's extension of the SD.

3.10 HLT 5 is delivered through a number of work programmes. The delivery of nature-based solutions, to draw down and sequester greater amounts of carbon will be a principal mechanism that will drive emission reductions and get us to our Net-Zero target. Our Strategy delivers this by:

- Setting ambitious targets for habitat restoration and creation through our Nature Recovery work.
- Encouraging woodland management and appropriate new woodland planting.
- Encouraging land-management practices that protect soils and increase their ability to sequester carbon.
- Supporting the transition to low-carbon for the land-based sector – in line with their own Net-Zero ambitions.

3.11 Supporting our local communities, through working with our constituent Local Authorities and supporting the rural economy to transition to a prosperous low-carbon future. The Action Plan delivers this by:

- Working with the wider National Parks family to establish the NPAs in a leadership role at UK level. Highlight the importance of investing in National Parks to effectively meet the challenge presented by Climate Change.
- Developing our role as UN 'Race to Zero' ambassadors, as the first group of National Parks to join the programme.
- Updating the Climate Adaptation Plan for the SDNPA. Review the current level of risk that Climate Change presents to the landscapes, ecosystem function, farming and the land-based sector.
- Delivering adaptation responses at scale, building ecological and societal resilience, linking to the statutory Partnership Management Plan as a delivery mechanism, best available evidence and planning for the long-term.
- Supporting the development of a high-level Climate Adaptation Plan for the UK National Parks and the wider National Landscapes family – sharing our experience and expertise in this sector.
- Delivering 'Net Zero with Nature' – Linking Nature Recovery and Climate Action.

- Using the opportunity of the Local Plan review to deliver effective Climate Action through the Planning System, revise and strengthen our current set of Climate Change related policies so they drive energy efficiency and emission reductions.
- Supporting the Land-based sector to transition to a low-carbon future.
- Working with our local communities – supporting them to take positive action on climate change and to become more resilient to the impacts for example the Ouse Valley Climate Action project.
- Working with our Local Authorities and Sector Partners to deliver an effective area-based approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation. Develop a joint Net-Zero plan for the National Park area.

National Park for All

- 3.12 There are several strands of work that make up this workstream of supporting action to increase the value of the National Park to under-served groups. Work covers delivery against HLTs 6 (Increase diversity of those engaging with, the South Downs National Park), HLT 7 (Work to make sure the landscape, scenery and tranquillity of SDNP is available to everyone, no matter what their access needs are) and HLT 8 (Digitally engage 100,000 people per year with the SDNP). It has been developed collaboratively across all Directorates.
- 3.13 Our outreach and health and well-being work aims to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities through increased participation by people from diverse backgrounds. Our work on learning and with young people aims to inspire future generations to feel connected to, and act for, nature and climate. Our work with volunteers aims to inspire a wide range of people to take positive action for nature and climate whilst improving their health and wellbeing. Our Cultural Heritage Connection and Creativity work strand aims to strengthen relevance and maximise benefits for people and place through identity, representation, well-being and economy. Priorities for 2024/25 are:
- 3.14 **Outreach and health and well-being** includes Health & Week-Being delivery for the Downs to the Sea project. Delivering our Campaign for National Parks Park Protector award shortlisted programme, Timescape III at Fishbourne Roman Palace and Buster Ancient Farm. Working with Sanctuary Café, Asphalaia and Rural Refugee Network to support nature connection experiences across the SDNP Refugees and Asylum seekers. Grant administration: Community Travel Grant; Outdoor Learning Grant; School reNature Grant; Youth Action Fund.
- 3.15 **Work with young people includes:** Youth Engagement project - recruit project officer and deliver SDNPA activities. South Downs Youth Ambassadors and Youth Voice: recruit new South Downs Youth Ambassadors and link into national NPUK youth voice work. South Downs Youth Action (SDYA): maintain delivery of 16-25 open and closed group programme, and pilot junior SDYA for 11-16 year olds with Western Downs ranger team. Green careers/pathways: coordinate and deliver work experience, work placement and careers events programmes. Develop an online Learning Hub to promote and share SDNP learning resources with schools, public and wider audiences. Deliver our Ambassador Schools programme.
- 3.16 **Volunteering priorities are:** Microvolunteering: support delivery of City Nature Challenge, promote and contribute to Look Wild project, maintain and develop Microvolunteering mailing list. Establish the volunteering offer: work with Seven Sisters Country Park Ranger Team to define role profiles and develop a recruitment and training plan, develop opportunities for SDYA and Microvolunteering on site. Develop, deliver and review Community Payback programme with Central Downs. Implement the recommendations of the Volunteer Review.
- 3.17 **Cultural Heritage Connection and Creativity priorities are:** contribute to the Heritage craft skills training and employability programme led by Sussex Heritage Trust. Implement Fair Game Project in partnership with Natural England and the University of Exeter. Deliver Archaeology Walks programme six walks during April - August 2024. Deliver a pilot project

with Climate Museum UK of workshops and activities linked to climate awareness and adaptation, specifically exploring how heritage, culture and creativity can inspire and communicate climate action.

3.18 **Our Access work** aims to improve and increase the availability of strategic access routes to allow greater connection with the National Park. Our Access priorities for 2024/25 in addition to our key statutory work of overseeing Access Land and facilitating the South Downs Local Access Forum are:

- Leading the South Downs Way National Trail Partnership and overseeing the maintenance, improvement and promotion of our National Trails including the South Downs section of the King Charles III England Coast Path.
- Through National Trails UK, lead their National Advisory Council and support Protected Landscape Partnership work streams including “Coastal Wildbelt” in support of our Nature Recovery work, “Monitoring Access” in support of our National Park for All work and “National Trails Carbon Baseline Pilot” in support of our Climate Action.
- Construct four new sections of Centurion Way extension, namely: Singleton Station (subject to listed building and planning consent); Southwest Bridges; Wellhanger Copse and Littlewood Farm (subject to ecological surveys). We are also undertaking improvements to the A286 Footway link to the extension in West Dean and plan to open the first sections of the extension in late spring 2025.
- Completing the weather delayed phase 6 of the Egrets Way from Lewes to Rodmell, maintain and upgrade the surface of Egrets Way between Southease and Deans Farm damaged by river overspill (subject to funding), and progress optioneering of the final phase 7 (on-highway C7) section at Piddinghoe.
- Managing the delivery of our Active Travel England project, funded through £100,000 of revenue grant funding. This will include the start of reviewing our 2017 Cycling and Walking Strategy with the aim of including the recommendations within the next PMP as well as progressing feasibility and design work of existing identified priorities.
- Administering year three of our DEFRA funded Access in Protected Landscapes project through the distribution of £200,000 of capital funding to improve the accessibility the South Downs National Park.
- Supporting Friends of Rother Valley Way continuation of landowner negotiations and route optioneering of Rother Valley Way priority phase from Petersfield to Nyewood.
- Continuing to work with stakeholders to progress Midhurst Greenway

3.19 **Our communications** work focuses on delivering the three key areas of the Corporate Plan: Nature, Climate, People; enabling everyone to take action on nature and climate through a targeted events and engagement programme, with a particular focus on those audiences we are not currently reaching; ensure that we are speaking out on the right issues to the right audiences including providing information to enable others to take action. Our priorities for 2024/25 are:

- Partnering with organisations and people of and working with communities not currently represented. An example of this is a shared walk, attended by 165 people, organised with Muslim Hikers/Active Inclusion Network at QECP on 19 May.
- Creating space on our platform through our imagery and also through our voices programme – this involves, articles, videos and audio recordings of a wide range of people.
- Continuing to promote the We Hear You Now immersive audio trail, which shares the voices of women writers of colour.
- Taking the National Park to where people are. This includes holding events at key sites around the urban fringe. During our Renature Festival in July, Dark Skies festival

in February and throughout our summer engagement programme we will have a presence at key sites including Brighton and Portsmouth.

- Provide more opportunities for people to directly engage with the National Park through wildlife walks and Microvolunteering opportunities.
- Building on the Accessibility hub on our website, sharing information and ideas on how and where to access the National Park through our Miles without Stiles Routes.
- Using relevant awareness days to promote access to the National Park.
- Holding hybrid festivals for ReNature and Dark Night Skies – providing online content to reach those not able to access in person events and to widen our online reach.
- Increasing our video content to increase reach and engagement across all channels, with a particular focus on continuing to grow our YouTube channel.
- Growing our digital community through the development of a Communities Hub on our website including a knowledge sharing area for communities and parishes around climate action.
- Growing our social media channels including the SSCP and South Downs National Park Trust channels to over 100,000 followers collectively.

4. Options & cost implications Existing delivery is funded through the budget and resource setting process and supplemented by significant additional income raised by the South Downs Trust. Some delivery is through funded projects, such as Innovate UK and National Heritage Lottery Fund. Other projects are in the pipeline subject to funding in year. As priorities are developed the budget is also developed during the annual budget setting cycle. The Strategic Fund is available to support SDNPA led initiatives.

5. Next steps

5.1 Teams will continue to deliver the priorities during the rest of the year. Performance is reported twice a year and examples and case studies are available in the quarterly bulletin.

6. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No – usually we would report on delivery of these priorities.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	The resources required to deliver the programmes are developed during the annual budget setting process.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Core funding is subject to scrutiny by Members and rigorous criteria are applied to projects and procurement.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	The programme delivers against all of the outcomes in the Partnership Management Plan.
Links to other projects or partner organisations	We work in partnership with a range of organisations to deliver our priorities.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	The climate action plan delivery contributes directly to the Authority's Climate Change objectives.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the	None

Implication	Yes*/No
proposal?	
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority’s equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Yes. All projects are subject to an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion assessment. As are all new major pieces of work.
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?	The Authority has Health and Safety policies and procedures which are observed by staff when delivering programmes of work.
Are there any Data Protection implications?	None, directly relevant to the paper however, staff adhere to organisational policies when delivering work or projects.

7. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

7.1 No risks associated with this paper. However, risk registers are developed for projects and risk assessments are carried out for relevant areas of work.

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South Downs National Park Authority

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Appendices
 1. Nature Recovery Programme 2024/5
 2. Climate Change Action Plan (v2024)
 3. National Park for All Theory of Change

SDNPA Consultees
 Chief Executive; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services

External Consultees
 None

Background Documents
[Corporate Plan 2020–2025 \(southdowns.gov.uk\)](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/corporate-plan-2020-2025)