

South Downs *focus*

Jan-Mar 2008

Working on behalf of Natural England, the local councils and communities across the South Downs



Welcome to 'South Downs Focus' which updates you on the varied work* carried out by the South Downs Joint Committee in conjunction with all relevant partners.

It is sub-divided into two parts: the strategic centre (focused on HQ) and the integrated Countryside Management Service, operating throughout the two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



*Much of the work of the SDJC is supported by the European Union Interreg IIIb programme



HQ - Communications, Planning & Strategic teams

Landscape Conservation (Management Plan ambitions 1,2,3,4,5)

Planning

During the past quarter the South Downs Joint Committee (SDJC) has been consulted on 139 planning applications. Three appeal statements have been written and three appeal decisions received (one dismissed and two allowed). The SDJC gave evidence at the Inquiry into the proposed Glyndebourne Wind Turbine .

The Planning Committee has commented on consultations on Streamlining Local Development Frameworks (LDFs), the draft PPS 4 (Planning for Sustainable Economic Development), the Winchester and East Hampshire Core Strategies Issues and Options documents and the Mid Sussex Core Strategy Pre-Submission document. It

has also considered a report on the Planning Bill and commented on the revised application for a wastewater treatment works and sludge recycling centre at Peacehaven (welcoming the addition of a green roof and more landscaping).

Another two undergrounding overhead lines projects were approved, one including approximately 1.5 km of separate BT poles/lines that BT Openreach are to underground at their own cost. This brings the total number of approved projects up to ten, resulting in the removal of 25.3km of overhead power lines at an approximate total cost of £2.6 million. Five more projects are being prepared for the current tranche of funding.



Artist's impression of the proposed 230ft Glyndebourne wind turbine

Sustainable Land Management, Rural Economy (Management Plan Ambitions 6 & 7)

Rural Economy & Sustainable Tourism

Work has continued in developing the Interreg IVB 'Collabor8' bid (previously named 'Aspire'). Overall the project has been shrunk from £20m to £10m, partly through the reduction in time from five years to three and a half years and partly by the removal of some elements of the bid. The SDJC part of the bid has in turn reduced from £3m to £1m. A further bid to South East England Development Agency is being developed with Tourism

South East and the South East Protected Landscapes to develop car-free itineraries.

Sustainable Land Management

SDJC has been working with its current INTERREG IIIb 'Lifescapes' partners to develop a future proposal incorporated into a 'City Breath' project being led by the City Council of the Hague in the Netherlands. SDJC is at an early stage, but it may provide the opportunity to include branding, innovative financing and urban

fringe activities, all core to the South Downs Management Plan. This is a development of the 'Living Landscape' ideas developed previously, and could include working with the High Weald AONB, Kent Downs AONB and Natural England (Thames Gateway). The proposal is currently geared to increasing the positive links between urban and rural areas and the management of the urban fringes/greenspace.

Recreation & Access

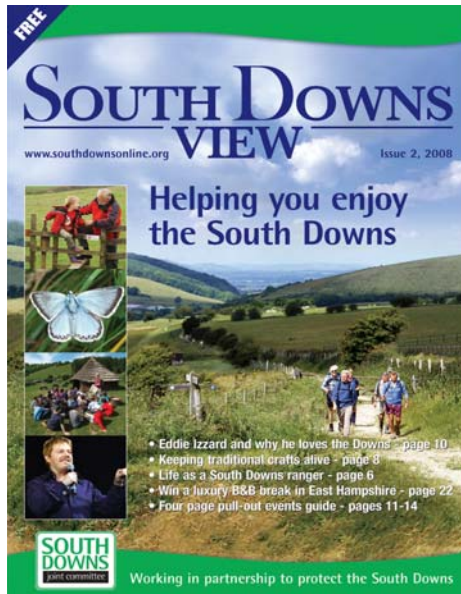
A draft report on the opportunities and priorities for water related recreation in the South Downs has been prepared by Plumpton College and University of Brighton. Jointly funded by the Environment Agency the research continues on from the data gathering that was carried out a couple of years ago.

Funding and future priorities for the South Downs Access Forum has been agreed for the forthcoming year.

Communications

South Downs View has been published and 35,000 copies are being distributed to various outlets throughout the South Downs. Reader feedback to date has been extremely positive. Over £3000 in advertising revenue was secured for this issue and it is hoped that this publication will eventually become cost-neutral.

A series of podcasts called 'Landshapers' has now been completed telling the story of the South Downs through the people who live and work in them. A joint project between SDJC, Natural England and



Issue 2 of South Downs View

Hampshire County Council, interviewees include a shepherd, farmer, geologist, woodworker, flintworker and WWII experts. A series of evocative photographs of the subjects and themes have also been taken to be synchronised with the audio

files as they play. The podcasts were recorded between January and March and will be available to download in May on the websites: www.southdownsonline.org, www.nationaltrail.co.uk/southdowns and www.hants.gov.uk.

The design of the South Downs Management Plan has been completed and printed copies will be going out to partners in April.

The Lawrence Copse Demonstration Woodland guide has now been published and is available from the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (Sussex) and our Western Area Office as well as at specific woodland events throughout the year.

A grant application was made to the South Downs Society to fund further development work on the online learning resource, the 'South Downs Learning Zone' (www.southdownsonline.org/learning). If the application is successful the work will involve the completion of the habitats section and extend the scope of science and cultural heritage on the site.

Management, Planning & Support

South Downs Action Plan

An Action Plan database has been developed to accompany the Management Plan. Ambition co-ordinators have started the process of contacting the Partners to identify actions that they will be taking over the coming year to achieve the ambitions in the Management Plan.

Staff

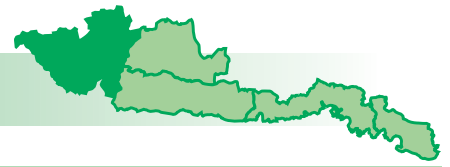
Funding for the 'Lifescapes Your Landscapes' Interreg Project finished at the end of March meaning that Neil Hill and Thyone Outram have now left the organisation.



Dutch farmers and entrepreneurs visited the South Downs in 2006 as part of the EU Interreg IIIb 'Lifescapes Your Landscapes' project

Nicola Redwood is due to go on maternity leave at the beginning of April. Val Phillips Assistant Visitor Services / Trainee Ranger at Seven Sisters in the Eastern Area has gone on to higher things – flying gliders! Dan Oakley has been taken on part-time on a temporary basis to cover the Volunteer Co-ordinator's role in the Hampshire Area. Welcome back to Debbie Shillingford who has been offered the post of Administrative Assistant on a permanent basis. James Ort's contract has been extended to the end of May whilst confirmation of Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) funding is awaited.

Hampshire area team - Quarterly Summary



Landscape & Archaeology (Man Plan Amb 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 10)

VRS work near Colemore

The VRS have done a great job of felling trees and removing rubbish from a rare A-grade windmill mound near Colemore. This 2m high hillock was once adorned with one of three windmills local to the area. The clearance work also revealed ramps leading up to the mound which presumably were used to bring grain into, and flour out of, the mill.



Lunchtime for the VRS while two stand atop the windmill mound.

Enjoyment & Understanding (Man Plan Ambition 10, 2)

Hyden Wood

Continuing our support of the woodland owners at Hyden Wood, SDJC held a free Woodland Archaeology day. Chris Webb of the National Trust kindly shared his

expertise, helping the woodland owners interpret varied features visible in their woods and envisage the past landscape as well as informing the owners how to better manage the features today.



Chris Webb (centre) talks the Hyden woodland owners group through an early 19th Century map of their woods

Communities (Management Plan Ambition 9)

Year of Food and Farming

Celebrating the Year of Food and Farming, the Hampshire Team have helped Buriton Parish put together a series of events that link food with farms and landscape. A number of activities are planned from local produce banquets, farm walks/talks, open days and volunteering on the nine farms of the parish including South Downs Brand producers.



Land management (Management Plan Ambition 6)

Selborne

After a long period of developing plans and working with partners and Blackmoor Estate, Selborne has been accepted into the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme through a targeted approach. The Hampshire Team has worked with the estate and key partners (Farming Wildlife Advisory Group and Natural England) to ensure that multiple benefits can be gained for the area. It consists of many different soil types. With heath to the east and chalk to the west, the area is unique under a single holding within the Hampshire area of the South Downs.



Selborne hangers

The underlying geology gives rise to a valued landscape and a wealth of biodiversity which, by recorded evidence, provided the inspiration for Gilbert White's Natural History of Selborne, thereby giving birth to the recorded study of natural history.

Environmental Improvement Grants (Man Plan Ambition 1, 4)

Environmental Improvement Grant 2007/2008

Take up has again been good for the Environmental Improvement Grant scheme, with 18 projects in total, including two community based projects, and 16 land based schemes.



A new native hedge Butser Ancient Farm

Work achieved through Environmental Improvement Grants

- 1333 metres of native hedgerow planted
- 2 chalk grassland sites restored
- 4 woodland projects
- 2 Ponds for Natterjack Toad
- 25 black poplars planted along the Meon
- 1 church path improved



Landscape and Cultural Heritage Conservation (Management Plan Ambitions 1, 2)

Dutch Elm Disease (DED)

Meetings were held with parishes and town councils in respect of future funding of the disease control programme and possible partnership funding opportunities.

Positive responses were received from those attending the meeting and further presentations are planned. A meeting was also held with Eastbourne BC, Adur DC and Brighton and Hove CC to coordinate DED control activities.

Volunteers

Training of volunteer group leaders was carried out to create some new leaders for tasks where staff are unavailable and to give those interested a new dimension to the volunteering experience. 2 tasks have



The protected elms of East Sussex are the only significant mature elm population left in the world.

been led by volunteers in the Eastern Area.

Miscellaneous Facts and Figures from Eastern Area

- Rights of way complaints received: 13
- Complaints dealt with: 12, 1 pending
- Hunt gates repaired – 6, Replaced – 2
- Step stiles replaced – 7, removed – 1
- Signposts replaced – 8, repaired – 2, new installations – 1
- Waymarkers replaced – 3, repaired – 2, cleared of vegetation – 5

Wildlife Habitats (Management Plan ambition 4)

Tor grass

Areas of invasive *Brachypodium pinnatum* (Tor grass) have been cut on Seven Sisters Country Park to allow more effective grazing to control the spread of this grass, which would otherwise dominate and exclude the other chalk grassland species found on the park. Extra fencing was installed and cattle have been introduced

into a further area to help manage the Tor Grass.

Higher Level Stewardship

A meeting was held with Natural England to review targetting for the new Higher Level, Environmental, Stewardship agri-environment scheme.



Sussex Cattle just about to graze 'Tor grass' in the 'Brachypodium field'

Recreation Enjoyment and Understanding (Management Plan Ambitions 8 & 10)

The Ice Prince

In late January, timber from the vessel the Ice Prince that went aground off Dorset started coming ashore all along the Sussex Heritage Coast. On 21st February a team of volunteers moved the 4 tonnes of wood into two piles which the salvors collected after much discussion and many emails. On the night of 10th/11th March there was a big storm with winds gusting to 80 mph so all the timber that had been lodged around Seaford and had previously proved to be uncollectable was now available for collection from our beach!

Salvors moved a further 200 tonnes from the beach at Cuckmere in early April. Further volunteer tasks will clear the timber from the river banks in due course.

During the week of 25th February the main car park was resurfaced by contractors working for ESCC.



Timber washed ashore at Cuckmere Haven from the Ice Prince.

The usual preparation for the start of the summer season took place and the South Downs Volunteer Rangers were busy in the Visitor Centre giving it a spring clean. The following week there was a volunteers' get-together to plan for the summer.

On 17th March, the Visitor Centre opened seven days a week for the summer season. This is the earliest it has happened.

On Good Friday the weather was unexpectedly good despite dire weather forecasts and we had nearly 200 visitors through the Visitor Centre on that day. There have been some positive comments about the newly resurfaced main car park. People seem to be delighted with the new look.

On 5/6th March there was an attempted theft of car parking meters. No money was taken.

Facts and Figures from Seven Sisters Country Park

- 3 bird walks, Jan, Feb and March with 8, 12, 3 people and 45, 29, 31 species on each respectively.
- 17th March Visitor Centre opened
- Late Feb Main car park resurfaced

Central area team - Quarterly Summary



Landscape Conservation (Management Plan Ambitions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6)

Stanmer Orchard hedgelaying event

The 450m long hedge bordering the orchard in Stanmer Village was laid during a 5-day event involving training volunteers and SDJC staff from across the organisation.

John Wilson, an expert in the traditional Sussex method and president of the South of England Hedge Laying Society provided the training.

This is important work to preserve the traditional farming techniques for future generations whilst providing a dense hedge, an ideal wildlife habitat. Coppicing work was carried out at Jointers Copse, creating stakes and binders required for the hedgelaying event.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Staff and volunteers have targeted scrub clearance on the chalk grassland SSSI at Devil's Dyke. This work is in partnership with the landowner who carried out fencing work, part financed by the Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to secure grazing. Other SSSI work includes clearing scrub on Lychpole Hill and fencing work at Coombe Down to allow for sympathetic grazing regimes to take place.

Other Landscape/Habitat conservation

Events and site visits have been attended, including the Ouse and Adur River Basin Planning Workshops, RSPB meetings and the Dutch Elm Disease Parish meeting. The grazing of both Mill Hill Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Benfield Hill LNR has been successful.



Stanmer Orchard hedge before and during hedgelaying'

Community (Management Plan ambition 9)

Community support

Support has continued for each of the community groups for Benfield Hill, Wolstonbury Hill and Telscombe Tye. Tasks have been led including gate maintenance at Telscombe Tye. Other support has included providing opportunities for training and identification of work when the groups create their task programmes.



'Friends of Telscombe Tye' conservation group



'Friends of Wolstonbury Hill' conservation group

Recreation Enjoyment and Understanding (Management Plan Ambitions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6)

Rights of way maintenance

The rights of way furniture maintenance contract has been completed using two local contractors. New signposts, gates and waymarks have been installed, following reports from the volunteer parish path rangers and the public. Following the strong winds on 10th March, staff removed fallen trees which were blocking paths.



Rights of way enhancement

Work was completed at Mile Oak Farm to improve the surface of a footpath and replace a stile with a kiss gate, improving access on a popular route.

150m of resurfacing was carried out on the South Downs Way (SDW) at East Chiltington to raise the level of the path, improving drainage. Grips have also been dug out and emptied on 'feeder routes'



SDW at East Chiltington, before and after resurfacing work

along the SDW, ensuring running water is taken off the path. Funding was provided by Natural England (NE) with Central Area staff organising and managing the work.

Sustainable transport

The Breeze Partnership meeting was attended, providing support for the Breeze buses that serve Stanmer Park, Ditchling Beacon and Devil's Dyke from Brighton. A meeting was also held with East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Highways to find a solution to traffic problems causing difficulties for the bus at Ditchling Beacon.

Facts and Figures

- Organised and led 20 volunteer tasks.
- 21 Rights of way complaints dealt with.



Landscape Conservation (Management Plan Ambitions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6)

Conservation, Biodiversity & Archaeology

The fencing of Hookway Down Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) and the area of chalk grassland at Monkton Deserted Medieval Village have now been completed. Grazing of both sites later on in the year will now finally be possible. In addition, scrub clearance has also been carried out on the Amberley Mount to Sullington Hill (at Amberley Coombes), Duncton to Bignor Escarpment (at Moon Copse) and Treyford to Bepton Downs (on Treyford Hill) Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and on Sullington Hill SNCI.

This quarter has also seen a substantial amount of work carried out on many Scheduled Ancient Monuments throughout the Western Area. On the ground, clearance work to enhance the archaeological features has been undertaken on the ramparts at Beacon Hill in Harting parish, on the cross-dyke at Stoughton Down and on the cross-dyke and bowl barrows adjacent to the South Downs Way (SDW) in Cocking, Heyshott and Graffham parishes.



Cross-dyke along the SDW in Cocking Parish after clearance.

Communities (Management Plan ambition 9)

Community Action, Liaison & Involvement

A Sussex Pathwatch meeting to continue the campaign against unauthorised motorised vehicles in the countryside was held at Lurgashall Village Hall in February. The meeting was well attended by both parish council representatives and user groups, illustrating the scheme's continuing support. At an implementation level, following patrol and partnership work by SDJC officers, Sussex Police and Amberley Parish Council,

registration details were obtained of persistent motorcyclists using the South Downs Way between Amberley and Storrington, resulting in two section 59 orders being issued under the Police Reform Act 2002. This order involves the issuing of a formal warning informing the owner(s) that if there are any further sightings of either themselves or the motorcycle committing the same offence that the vehicle can be seized.

Recreation, Enjoyment & Understanding (Management Plan ambition 8 & 10)

Public Rights of way

The recent strong winds have brought a number of trees down across rights of way in the Western Area and, where possible, rangers have been swift to get them cleared. However, this has not been possible at North Stoke in Amberley parish where a large tree fell across the attractive and recently restored suspension bridge (see opposite) causing substantial damage to the bridge itself. As a result, the footpath has had to be closed and liaison is now underway with WSCC to commence an inspection of the damage and subsequent repairs.

On a positive note, access improvements have included the re-grading of Telegraph Lane (Harting 884) a well used bridleway onto Harting Downs (photos opposite), the replacement of a footbridge on a popular route outside Nyewood (Harting 869) and the installation of new hunt gates along a bridleway at Sullington (Storrington & Sullington 2686).



Fallen tree across the suspension bridge at North Stoke.



Re-grading of Telegraph Lane (Harting 884) - Before & After.

Site Management

Fly-tipping has been removed from Houghton Viewpoint (a combination of clay and soil) and Greatham Bridge (garden waste). The return of English Longhorn cattle in February to graze the grassland area at Fairmile Local Nature Reserve was once again a popular sight for users.

Facts and Figures

- Staff and volunteers replaced 23 fingerposts, 8 stiles (and repaired a further 4), 2 hunt gates, and 1 footbridge.
- 8 formal site meetings with farmers/landowners on agri-environment/conservation issues.



Northern area team - Quarterly Summary

Landscape Conservation (Management Plan Ambitions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6)

Heathland Project

The Heathland Project as such has come to an end. The project has been a great success in recreating hundreds of hectares of heathland across the Wealden Greensands. The finishing touches were carried out with all the tree work and removal of rhododendron on Black Down. New views looking out from the top of Black Down across the Western Weald towards the Downs have been created too. The Volunteer Ranger Service carried out tasks on Woolbeding Common, Iping Common, Heyshott Common, Black Down, Chapel Common, Linchmere Ridge with the clearance of birch and gorse scrub.

There were also joint tasks carried out with SDJC staff and Fittleworth Parish on Hesworth Common and also with the Friends of Midhurst Common. Interested heathland landowners and managers were taken to see a demonstration of bracken

control carried out by the National Trust who are using pigs to grub out and eat the bracken rhizomes.

The fight to save our heaths will continue with external funding secured to keep on our Heathland Officer, Rob Free, who will be manning the helm with the rest of the Northern Area team and the help of the fantastic volunteers.



Black Down, West Sussex

Historic Environment

Clearance of vegetation around the Roman road on Iping Common was carried out to help preserve this historic monument with the help of volunteers regularly working on heathland. Clearance was also carried out on the two Bronze Age barrows, clearing gorse and birch. Thick scrub was cleared around the base of the old trees in Burton Park to help bring back the parkland character near Black Pond.

Burton Pond

More clearance of vegetation along the dam between Burton Pond and Chingford Pond was carried out as well as along the nature trail.

Recreation, Enjoyment & Understanding (Management Plan ambition 8 & 10)

Rights of Way

The Northern Area Team have dealt with 49 Rights of Way complaints this last quarter. A number of these reports have come about due to Ramblers Association members walking complete parishes and reporting problems they found. This has increased our feedback on the ground in addition to our own Volunteer Parish Path Ranger reports. These complaints varied from broken stiles, missing sign posts and steps, but, in particular, a number of fallen trees caused by storms. The bad weather has caused more erosion problems to rights of way coming from neighbouring fields.



Fallen tree at Sutton

Communities (Management Plan ambition 9)

Community work

Northern Area staff gave a talk to the parish of Tillington to inspire the community to make progress with their own Habitat Parish Map in the coming year.

The Northern Area team also supported the Midhurst Area Cycling Group by assisting with path clearance around the outskirts of Midhurst.



Cleared path near Midhurst for cyclists

Facts and Figures

- Supported 20 volunteer tasks involving Rights of Way work and Heathland Management.
- 49 Rights of Way complaints dealt with.
- 2 Talks were given to the public - Heathland works - Horsham Natural History Society
Habitat Mapping - parish of Tillington.

Volunteer Ranger Service - Quarterly Summary

Landscape Conservation (Management Plan Ambitions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6)

Practical Conservation

147 VRS group day tasks delivering biodiversity and landscape conservation benefits were led by SDJC staff, leaders from 14 partner organisations and by trained Volunteer Ranger Service (VRS) leaders. For most of the period, the focus was on clearance work in a variety of habitats. Woodland coppicing formed around 20% of this work, some of this providing stakes and binders for hedgelaying work and training. Other work included beach cleaning at Cuckmere Haven, fencing, raking, making bird and dormouse boxes, orchard management, ring barking of sycamore, tree nursery work and dead hedging.

End of Lifescape Project

The Interreg funded Lifescape project finished at the end of the quarter. This has impacted on the VRS team's ability to provide support to volunteers, as funding for administration and support as well as task leadership and transport is now reduced. VRS is largely closed to new recruits until additional funding is found or there is a significant loss of volunteers. Work is on-going to identify new funding opportunities.



Volunteer Rangers and SDJC staff lay a hedge in Stanmer Park, Central Area

Communities (Management Plan ambition 9)

Local Groups Web Page

The Lifescape Community Involvement Officer has been gathering contact information and areas of expertise/interest from local conservation groups throughout the South Downs. The aim is to make this available on www.southdownsonline.org to help groups share information.

group by the end of the Lifescape project was successfully achieved. The group now has its own trained leaders, website, finances (grants and donations totalling over £7000) and organisational ability. The 'Friends' group continue to organise their own public and group events, with the support of SDJC and the VRS.

Friends of Wolstonbury Hill

The intention to leave the 'Friends of Wolstonbury Hill' as a fully self-sustaining

Two 'Friends of Wolstonbury hill' on a task day in February'



Communities (Management Plan ambition 9)

Access Improvement

The renewed focus on habitat management as autumn arrived meant less access and Rights of Way work – 16 tasks in all, replacing gates, stiles and signposts and clearing and widening paths/rides.

Other work

Extensive work by a Volunteer Ranger over recent months (and continuing) to annotate Geographical Information System (GIS) maps of Rights of Way in SDJC's Central Area, is providing clearer, more usable maps for contractors, volunteers and staff.

The 4th edition of the VRS Training and Reference Manual has been published ready for the VRS Training course starting in April. The updates are also available to all existing Volunteer Rangers. Many thanks to Volunteer Ranger Ron McCann for managing the project.

Help and advice was given to visitors at Seven Sisters Country Park and Visitor Centre. Monitoring of the condition of Rights of Way and Open Access land by volunteers continues.

Training for Volunteer Leaders

Mentoring and assessment on tasks of 5 trainee volunteer task leaders was achieved, building on extensive training for these and a number of other trainees in Task Leadership theory, driving (both on and off-road) and First Aid. This was supported by the AONBs Sustainable Development Fund and Interreg Lifescape project.

Facts and Figures

Total volunteer effort 1633 days

187 practical, training and promotional volunteer tasks, 104 led by SDJC

Practical Work by District (total 1050 person days):
 East Hampshire 67; Winchester 16; Adur 66; Arun 135; Chichester 277; Horsham 12; Mid-Sussex 26; Brighton and Hove 66; Eastbourne 46; Lewes 93; Wealden 246