

# SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS  
NATIONAL PARK

## WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Triumph for nature** Find out about the tens of thousands of trees planted across the National Park to help biodiversity bounce back – and our vow to plant one million more!
- **£1.9m early Christmas gift** Discover the range of community projects benefitting from funding.
- **Boxing Day walks** Get some inspiration for Christmas strolls in the South Downs.
- **CHRISTMAS COMPETITION!** Win a tour and tasting at an amazing South Downs distillery!

As always, please send your comments and ideas to us at [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk)

## Treemendous! Campaign smashes 100,000 target

**The South Downs National Park has smashed its target of planting 100,000 trees by the middle of this decade – and has now set its sights on planting at least one million more.**

The huge tree planting drive includes a much-needed resurgence of the iconic elm tree, a lost beacon of the British countryside due to elm disease. A total of 3,500 disease-resistant elms will be in the ground by the end of this winter, providing havens for threatened species such as the White Letter Hairstreak butterfly.

The Trees for the Downs campaign launched at the end of 2019 and has far exceeded all expectations, raising over £400,000 from donors and members of the public to kickstart nature restoration across the South East region.

This winter alone, over 40,000 new trees are going into the ground, bringing the total to 117,700 trees across 150 sites in Sussex and Hampshire.

The tree planting is a mixture of woodland, civic and community planting, hedging and orchards – all providing



a range of oxygenating, carbon-storing trees to provide homes for birds, mammals and insects.

But the campaign, led by the South



Downs Trust, the official charity of the National Park, is just getting started. A target has been set to plant 1m more trees between now and 2035, focusing on identifying suitable sites for tree planting, including new woodland and hedges.

The potential for planting trees in the region is huge. A major study three years ago covered just over 439,000 hectares – all of Sussex plus Hampshire's portion of the National Park – and found almost 23,000 hectares is highly suitable for creating new woods – around five per cent of the land area. The potential new area of woodland – twice the size of Manchester – could store up to 37,667,500 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> after 100 years.

None of the tree planting would have been possible without significant support from businesses and the public. Among the donors are: Aspinall of London, the

## A coat for all seasons



**A very special coat is coming to Lewes in the new year as a powerful reminder of the power of community to tackle threats to the natural world.**

Bull House, the Lewes home of one of America's founding father's Thomas Paine, will be welcoming "The Coat of Hopes" on Sunday, 4 January.

The arrival of the coat will launch the 2026 programme of Thomas Paine: Legacy, for a busy year exploring freedom, liberty and democracy in the lead-up to the 250th anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence.

Instigated by Lewes-based artist Barbara Keal, the Coat of Hopes is a powerful community artwork made from blanket patches stitched with people's hopes in response to the climate and ecological emergency. Having been made on a walk of 2,000 miles across the UK, and worn by hundreds in an ever-growing pilgrimage, the Coat's arrival in Lewes marks a significant moment for Thomas Paine: Legacy, whose activity next year will be inspired by Paine's words *"we have it in our power to begin the world over again."*

The day begins with an 8-mile walk from Brighton to Lewes, open to all. At 3pm, the public is invited to welcome the Coat at Cliffe Bridge, accompanying it up the High Street, including a stop at Lewes Climate Hub, before it goes on display at Bull House.

Throughout January, visitors are invited to come into Bull House to reflect on the Coat's message and to set their own intentions for the year ahead.

Leanne O'Boyle, Director of Thomas Paine: Legacy, said: "As we approach the anniversary of Paine's Common Sense, I'm delighted to work with Barbara Keal and the Coat of Hopes team as this remarkable artwork returns to Lewes, encouraging people to think about the future of their own communities."

Barbara said: "The enormity of climate and ecological breakdown begs us to recognise our dependence on each other to maintain a world which is liveable. The energy to "begin the world over again" must come from love, and a willingness to act on behalf of others.

Find out more at [coatofhopes.uk](https://coatofhopes.uk) To join the walk, email [yes@coatofhopes.uk](mailto:yes@coatofhopes.uk)

Boltini Trust, Boomtown Festival, Chalk Cliff Trust, Friends of the South Downs, Higgidy, Jude's, London to Brighton EV Rally, Nyetimber, OSB Group, South East Water, Sykes Cottages, Southern Co-op, University of Sussex, Willmott Dixon, together with founding patrons of the charity and hundreds of members of the public.

Nick Heasman, of the South Downs National Park Authority, a forester and ecologist, helping to lead the campaign, said: "When we launched Trees for the Downs six years ago, we were never quite sure how big it would become. The reaction has been nothing short of



extraordinary, and I think it underlines people's affection for trees. In a tough and uncertain world, trees really are a symbol of hope and restoration and that's exactly the impact they are having in the South Downs National Park.

"It's a big moment for us to have reached our target as we celebrate the National Park's 15th birthday.

"Trees provide clean air for us to breathe, enrich our soils, provide vital habitats for wildlife and are amazing at capturing carbon carbon."

Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the National Park Authority, said: "This is the most fantastic, inspiring news and shows what National Parks can achieve when we all pull together for nature and climate.

"I'd like to thank each and every organisation and individual who has contributed to this wonderful effort. Your support will make a huge difference for decades to come, creating a lasting legacy for the natural environment that everyone can be really proud of."

Some notable highlights:

- More than 2,800 trees are currently being planted to create a new woodland in front of Levin Down in West Sussex. Singleton Primary School will use the woodland for outdoor classes and it will help boost biodiversity on the Goodwood Estate.
- An avenue of disease-resistant elms has been planted at Centenary Park, Peacehaven, creating a new gateway into the National Park.
- Four elm trees have been planted in Alfriston, East Sussex. The "Elms of the Fallen" will remember lives lost during the First World War.
- Almost 850 black poplars, an under-threat native species known for its knobbly twigs and fluffy cotton-like seeds, have been planted as part of the Sussex Black Poplar project.

Trees for the Downs has been supported by arboricultural experts at Mill Farm Trees Winchester, as well as Hillier and Kew Gardens.

A fresh round of expressions of interest are being invited for new tree planting in the National Park next winter. Visit [here](#) for more information or email Miriam Swan at [grants@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:grants@southdowns.gov.uk)

Donate to Trees for the Downs [here](#)



## An early Christmas gift



**Improving village halls, schools, playgrounds, bus shelters, access paths and libraries are among the goals of a major funding boost from the South Downs National Park Authority.**

As 2025 draws to a close, the National Park is announcing 31 projects across Sussex and Hampshire that will receive a share of just under £1.9m. The funds have been raised through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which is administered by the National Park Authority and paid by developers as a means of supporting new community infrastructure.

In addition to this, 31 parish and town councils across the National Park are sharing a slice of almost £300,000 to spend on grassroots community projects in their own areas.



Tim Slaney, Director of Planning at the National Park Authority said: "As we come to the end of 2025 and the National Park's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it's wonderful to be able to share this good news.

"I'm so pleased that we're able to help such a diverse range of projects, including many that will help young people connect with nature and improve access opportunities so people can enjoy this landscape and all its wellbeing benefits. I'm also pleased to see several village hall renovations – these buildings have been the hub of local communities for generations, but many need refurbishment and I'm glad we're able to help.

"For several years, the Community Infrastructure Levy has been an important element of our role as planning authority for the National Park and I'm delighted we've been able to help so many different projects that might not otherwise receive funding."

The Authority has now opened the call for projects for the 2025/2026 round of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding. Find out more [here](#)

### **The full list of projects:**

#### **Hampshire**

**Cheriton Stream, near Winchester** – Restoring the Source of the River Itchen £59,160

**Twyford** – Flood alleviation scheme £51,000

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**Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Waterlooville** – Improving nature play area £50,000

**Earthworks Trust Limited, Sustainability Centre, East Meon** – Outdoor nature classroom for all seasons £48,308

**Itchen Navigation** – Surface and bank improvements £95,000

**Butser Hill, Clanfield** – Livestock management and conservation grazing £35,000

**Clanfield Junior School** – Nature recovery eco-classroom and area £29,000

**Blackmoor Village Hall** – Solar panels £25,000

**Shortheath Common, Bordon** – improvements to boardwalk and dragon's teeth £20,000

**Liss Infant School** – Outside Play Equipment £35,000

**Steep Common, Petersfield** – entrance and access improvements £7,000

### **West Sussex**

**Fittleworth School** – Project will focus on adapting to climate change, demonstrating sustainable water management (SuDs) and nature recovery as well as providing education, play and sporting opportunities £150,000 (on top of £200,000 already received)

**Centurion Way (West Dean to Cocking)** – creation of walking and cycling route on disused railway line £390,000

**West Ashling / Funtington Village Hall** – Parish Hall refurbishment £140,000

**Bury** – Village hall refurbishment £100,000

**Bury CE Primary School** – new canopy £40,000

**Harting Primary School** – Outdoor learning facilities and play equipment £56,745

**Bignor Roman Villa** – toilet improvements £50,000

**Rogate** – multi-games area restoration £40,000

**Petworth Library** – accessibility improvements £38,000

**Midhurst** – Upgrading and improving Carron Lane Playpark £20,000

**Amberley** – improving Crossgates bus shelter £6,000

**Graffham Down Trust** – Interpretation Boards on South Downs Way £1,800

### **East Sussex**

**Stanmer Park, Brighton** – access improvements £100,000

**Safer C7 Project between Lewes and Newhaven** – help towards safety improvements on Piddinghoe Road £81,105

**Falmer** – pond restoration as part of Downs to the Sea project £80,000

**School Hill House Dr Surgery, Lewes** – Decarbonisation measures as part of OVESCO project £65,000

**Woods Mill Nature Reserve, near Henfield** – replacing bird hide and pond platforms at site run by Sussex Wildlife Trust £24,800

**Polegate/A27** – Signage for diverting the National Cycle Network route 2 and the Avenue Verte within the South Downs National Park £9,950

**Ovingdean** – New tree planting £3,456

## Young people reap benefits



**More than 7,500 children have been able to enjoy the wonders of the natural world and experience incredible landscapes thanks to two much-needed grants schemes.**

Over the past year around 6,800 children from across Sussex, Hampshire and Surrey have had the opportunity to visit the South Downs on school trips as part of the National Park's Outdoor Learning Grant scheme. Funding of £70,000 from the South Downs Trust and the National Park Authority supported almost 120 school trips, including to places such as Cuckmere Haven, Butser Ancient Farm, Devil's Dyke, Gilbert White's Study Centre, and Pulborough Brooks.

Meanwhile, more than 800 pupils from urban areas with pockets of socio-economic deprivation – including Hastings, Eastbourne, Newhaven, Brighton and Portsmouth – have enjoyed day visits, farm tours and residential stays thanks to the "Generation Green 2" initiative. The programme, funded by Defra, was a huge success following the Covid pandemic and recently returned to ensure that children from economically-disadvantaged areas have the opportunity to explore and play in green spaces.



Activities included guided wildlife walks, nature connection sensory games, wild arts and crafts, stargazing with a "night under the stars", map reading, and learning about water conservation.

Laura Sercombe, Director of Landscape and Strategy at the National Park Authority, said: "We want all children to be able to experience the joys, memories and learnings of the South Downs National Park with its amazing biodiversity, landscapes, and history.

"Sadly, many children still do not have access to green spaces, with the latest national research showing that almost a fifth of young people living in the most deprived areas never visit a natural environment."

Applications for the Outdoor Learning Grant will open again in early 2026 and schools can apply for funding support [here](#)

## Inspiration for festive walks



**'Tis the most wonderful time of the year – and a great opportunity to connect with your National Park and enjoy a festive stroll!**

With crisp fresh air, crunchy leaves underfoot, frost-capped hills and stunning vistas to invigorate the soul, there's something very special about a winter walk in the South Downs.

It's the perfect place to enjoy a festive amble, dusting off those Christmas cobwebs after one too many mince pies and mulled wines!

But where to go?

Here's some inspiration, depending on your mood and how you're feeling. We all know the joys of Christmas, as well as the hidden stresses and strains, so here are some ideas depending on how energetic you're feeling!

### **Walking in a winter wonderland**

Stanmer Park is one of the key gateways to the National Park and looks gorgeous at Christmas!

Covering approximately 5,000 acres, Stanmer has a wealth of history to be discovered, including the

The church, the village and manor house.

The restored walled garden – **One Garden** – is not to be missed and there's some great seasonal fare on offer at this time of the year!

Our walks leaflet suggests a **5.5 mile circular route** through the semi-ancient Stanmer Woods, home to old and gnarled beech trees.

### **A journey back in time – one for the history lovers**

Arundel has it all and is well-served by train if you want to leave the car at home and perhaps fancy a festive tipple in one of its many pubs!

Yuletide is a magical time in the historic time as Christmas trees illuminate the high street every December. With festive farmers markets, carol concerts in the Cathedral and plenty of independent shops to buy seasonal gifts, it's the perfect place to get into the festive spirit.

Our **walking leaflet** offers a couple of different options. You could opt for the shorter four-mile walk around Swanbourne Lake and the River Arun or go for a longer



seven-mile walk through Arundel Park and South Stoke, taking in the Monarch's Way – the supposed route taken by Charles II on his escape from England to France after the defeat by Oliver Cromwell at Worcester in 1651.

### Peace and quiet – and no big hills!



Scenic views abound at the Iping and Stedham Miles Without Stiles route and it's a place you can really soak up the tranquillity and switch off. The route starts in the car park of Iping and Stedham

Common, a nature reserve managed by Sussex Wildlife Trust and one of the best examples of lowland heath in the National Park.

The 1.25 mile/ 2km circuit is suitable for people with restricted mobility, including all-terrain mobility scooters and families with pushchairs. The walk typically takes 30 mins to complete.

### Fun for all the family

If you're on the hunt for an easy access route this Christmas season, try West Walk, near Fareham. With hardy surfaced paths winding their way between tall pine trees and a fun adventure woodland play area for the children, this is a perfect spot for a merry stress-free day out in the woods!



Check out our Miles Without Stiles route [here](#).

### Leave the car at home

We all know Christmas driving can be stressful, trying to visit as many people as possible over a short period! So why not take the train and enjoy a relaxing day-out in the South Downs?

On the main London line, Haslemere and Liphook Railway Stations are two fantastic stepping stones into the National Park. The routes incorporate long sections of the Serpent Trail, which 'snakes' its way 64 miles from Haslemere to Petersfield. Designed to showcase the heathland habitat and outstanding landscape of the greensand hills, their wildlife, history and conservation, it passes through the purple heather, green woods and golden valleys.

With a few short steep climbs for those wanting to get the heart going, these routes feature the heathlands of Marley, Lynchmere, Stanley and Chapel commons as well as the dramatic ancient woodland of Rake Hanger.

**Another great walk** to decompress and "get away from it all" for a few hours!

Wherever you go this Christmas, remember to care for this stunning landscape by not dropping litter, picking up dog poo, keeping dogs on leads around livestock and, of course, remember to enjoy yourself and make some memories!

For more walking ideas visit our [hub](#).

## SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### Win tour of amazing distillery!



**Overlooking stunning views of the National Park is the multi-award-winning distillery, Spirit of the Downs.**

It's in fact the only Brandy House in the UK using the finest local grapes to craft a range of award-winning brandy, grape vodka, and liqueurs at its distillery.

And hot off the press, just in time for Christmas, **Spirit of the Downs** is launching its new and very delicious Wild Stork Gin, made with locally sourced and foraged botanicals. The gin was officially launched at the distillery on 1 December and is also available at their Christmas Fair on 14 December from 11am till 3pm.

Sales of the new spirit will help to protect the National Park and create new havens for nature as 50p per sale of each bottle will go towards the South Downs Trust, the official charity of the National Park.

Michael Yeoman, CEO and Founder, explains that sustainability is at the heart of this local business.

"We're based near Bolney wine estate, overlooking the National Park where most of the vineyards that we work with are based and have won 13 international awards for our range of grape based spirits," he says.



"Our spirits are made with sustainability in mind, typically using pressed grapes from the finest small-batch sparkling wine producers. 'Leave No Trace' is one of my fundamental life and business principles minimising our impact on the planet."

Spirit of the South Downs currently has a range of its drinks on sale at the visitor centre at Seven Sister Country Park, as well as a well-stocked **online shop here**.

We've teamed up with Spirit of the Downs to offer two free pairs of tickets for a tour and tasting at the distillery.

People signing up to the newsletter during December will be automatically entered into the draw to win the tickets. Those who are already signed up can email "Spirit of the Downs" to [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk) before midnight on 31 December.

Sign up to the newsletter [here](#) and see competition T&Cs [here](#).

**Pic Credits** – P1 Pony Heaven Joe James; Trees by Richard Murray

# Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

from everyone at the  
South Downs National Park Authority



Vanessa Rowlands  
Authority Chair



Siôn McGeever  
Chief Executive Officer

**15** SOUTH DOWNS  
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Sing a Song by Corinne Kozok

**SEE YOU IN 2026!**