

# SOUTH DOWNS PLANNING NEWS

UPDATES FROM YOUR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

## New affordable homes on brownfield land

**Much-needed affordable housing has been given the green light for brownfield sites in Petworth.**

The National Park's Planning Committee gave the go-ahead, subject to completion of a legal agreement, for Hyde Housing Association to demolish garages across 11 sites near Station Road. The garages are undersized and are no longer used for parking vehicles.

In their place will be 19 affordable homes with new access, parking spaces and landscaping.

The development achieves a number of key sustainability goals, including creating a new wildlife-friendly orchard, protecting and retaining existing trees, new wildflower areas and planting new trees.

To achieve the 19% carbon dioxide reduction specified in the South Downs Local Plan, the development includes a number of features, including high



insulation levels, high-performance windows, solar panels and sustainable Kelda showers.

A sensitive lighting strategy will be employed to minimise impact on the International Dark Sky Reserve.

Sarah Round, Principal Development Management Officer, said: "The National Park Authority is committed to helping to deliver affordable housing across the South Downs and this development within an established residential area achieves that goal.

"It's making good use of brownfield land and is also enhancing green infrastructure by going over the 10% biodiversity net gain national policy requirement, as well as exceeding energy performance requirements.



"This is a high-quality, sustainable development that will bring a number of benefits to Petworth."

## Go-ahead for cabin in the woods



Previous damage and contamination in the woods

### **New forest school facilities to help children learn about nature and the environment have been approved at a previously contaminated wood.**

Chris Nutley, owner of Pondtail Wood, and 'Wood and Wild', an established forest school business, were given planning permission by the National Park Authority to build a fully accessible cabin within the beautiful woodland, near Albourne, Hassocks.

The business currently works with over 10 schools across Sussex and the cabin will expand its offer, creating a safe alternative learning space where children can learn while being immersed in nature. Current sessions include parent-and-toddler groups, afterschool clubs, sessions for children who are home educated and nature-based learning for neurodivergent families.

It comes after a stop notice was served by the National Park Authority in 2016 for illegal felling and the dumping of thousands of tonnes of construction waste by a previous site owner.

Stella New, Development Management Lead, said: "This is a fantastic turnaround for this ancient woodland, which was under threat by illegal felling and contamination a decade ago. This planning approval will connect scores of children with the outdoors and help them to learn about the importance of landscape and biodiversity, so it's very much in line with our goals as a National Park of creating custodians for the future."

Mr Nutley, site owner and Toni Friar, manager of 'Wood and Wild', said: "The approved application will allow many more children the opportunity to experience and enjoy the woodland.

"It will be a wonderful and complete turnaround for the better, given how the site was damaged by a previous owner. The boost for the forest school will turn setback into success and both the kids and nature will thrive."

## Inspector backs enforcement



### **An appeal to retain a parking area next to a manor house dating back to the 1700s has been dismissed.**

Planning Inspector RJ Redford upheld the National Park Authority's decision not to retrospectively permit a parking area in the immediate vicinity of Stanmer House, near Brighton, which is now subject to an enforcement notice requiring its removal.

The house is Grade I listed and dates to the 1720s, although various alterations were made in the 19th century. It was built by Nicholas Dubois for the illustrious Pelham family of Sussex and is surrounded by formal gardens, including an historic fountain.

Planning permission was granted last year for the conversion of the first and second floors of house and since then listed building consent has been granted for several elements, including extension to the paved terrace and reintroduction of Georgian windows to the southern façade. However, an application to retain the parking area was refused. Temporary permission for parking near the house had expired and the Authority had to undertake enforcement action as parking was continuing unlawfully.

Writing in her appeal report Ms Redford said: "The intrusive nature of cars parking in this area would erode the garden character by introducing a functional use into an area specifically designed for visual and recreational enjoyment. This would be at odds to the purposeful design of the House which contains functional elements away from the south and front elevations. Therefore, the proposed car park would fail to preserve the setting of the House."

A number of large car parks are already available on the Stanmer Estate, including the Patchway public car park that is nearest to the House.

Emma Goodwin, Planning Enforcement Officer, said: "This is a very good outcome for the National Park in terms of protecting important heritage assets within a conservation area. Stanmer is a key gateway to the National Park and its historic buildings and gardens are part of the wider heritage of Brighton. The car park clearly caused harm to this historic site."

## £1.9m boost for communities



Cheriton is among those benefitting from funding

**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.**

We're 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 Placemaking at the National Park Authority said: "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

**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

# “Camaraderie, banter and mutual support are vital”



**Tim Slaney, Director of Placemaking for the National Park Authority, writes about the many varied aspects of his role.**

## **Being a Director of Planning in a National Park**

Being a Director of Placemaking in a National Park is one of the most fascinating, varied, and when it goes well, rewarding roles imaginable. No more than at this time of change and opportunity. National Parks are not just beautiful landscapes; they are vital to the UK's future. They contribute to tackling inequality, improving health and wellbeing, supporting local communities, sustainable energy production, and addressing the climate and biodiversity crises. Land use and land management in these cherished places can play a powerful role in shaping a better future.

### **A Unique and Challenging Role**

The job is not without its challenges. Providing leadership and managing teams, balancing competing priorities, and working in a very public environment where everyone has a view, and the results are physically on the ground, can be demanding. Evening meetings, where excitement and passion prevail and views are strongly expressed are part and parcel of the role. Listening to conversations and adapting where possible is necessary.

Yet there is joy in meeting people and groups from many different backgrounds, who care deeply about their places. That balance of joy and demands is why the National Parks England Directors of Planning Group is so important to me.

### **The Power of Collaboration**

As a group of 10 Lead 'Planners' in National Parks, we meet three times a year, sometimes on one of our "patches," other times online. And with countless conversations in between, we get to know each other quite well. These meetings are more than formal discussions; they are opportunities to share experiences, debate policies, and importantly, support one another. The public can be hard critics of the planning system and planners, we know that. But to justify developments, sometimes of an innovative or quirky nature, on site, to colleagues is next level! But

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this exchange of ideas strengthens our collective approach.

As well as providing vital support for each other and learning, we influence Government thinking on planning in National Parks, nearly 10% of the English land mass, and share best practice.

Whether it's contributing to the Biodiversity Net Gain agenda or ensuring transport and water authorities enhance their services in National Parks, our work has real impact.

### **Protecting Local Identity While Enabling Progress**

Although our Parks are miles apart, we operate in the same planning environment. We strive to ensure that every place reflects its locality and special qualities, while also enabling progress. Recently, we successfully argued against being included in a nationalised approach to Planning Committees, highlighting that our committees are often filled with experts appointed by the Secretary of State and knowledgeable locals. This independence allows us to tailor decision-making to the needs of each area.

### **Looking Ahead: Spatial Development Strategies**

We are now working hard to secure a statutory role in emerging sub-regional planning systems through Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs). As a long-term advocate of broader-scale planning, clear locations for growth and conservation, and integration of infrastructure and the rural economy, I see SDSs as a wonderful opportunity. And wouldn't it be great to see proper national and regional maps that all can engage with!

Yet, at present, National Parks are only to be consulted at the end of the sub regional plan making process, despite being sole planning authorities for vast areas. This omission feels short-sighted, given how cities and towns rely on our landscapes for services, leisure, and wellbeing.

### **Celebrating Success**

Amidst the challenges, we find time to celebrate. This can be in historic and culturally significant hostleries! As importantly, we continue to showcase our achievements. A few years ago, we produced a document highlighting how National Parks enhance our national treasures, and although it is now out of date, it remains a reminder of what we can accomplish.

### **The Value of Camaraderie**

Finally, being the first Director of Placemaking here is an honour. It's reassuring to know that others have forged the way elsewhere and can offer guidance. The camaraderie, banter, and mutual support are vital. In such a unique role, finding balance is essential, and the shared experience of colleagues makes all the difference.

## Update on the Local Plan



**Claire Tester, Head of Strategic Planning, gives a useful update on the South Downs Local Plan and the next steps towards adoption of a new masterplan for placemaking in the National Park.**



The Proposed Submission Local Plan is being reported to Planning Committee on 12 February and the full National Park Authority on 20 March for agreement to publish it for

final public comments (Regulation 19).

The publication in May/June is the last opportunity for people to comment on the new Local Plan before the Authority submits it to the Inspectorate for examination.

The Planning Inspector will be sent any representations that are made during this Regulation 19 publication.

Any comments should relate to legal compliance or soundness of the Local Plan (that it is consistent with national policy), and advice will be provided to help members of the public to do this.

The Local Plan will be submitted for examination in the Autumn, along with any representations received during the Regulation 19 publication.

The Authority will also submit a list of any proposed modifications to the Local Plan.

The Inspector will consider these and make recommendations about any changes to the Plan that are needed to make it 'sound'.

There will be a further public consultation on any major modifications to the Local Plan before the Inspector's final report is made.

Subject to this being positive, it is anticipated that the Local Plan will be adopted sometime during 2027.

Read key documents and find updates at our [hub](#). **A useful FAQs can be read here.**

## A word about water neutrality



The Government has now **lifted a four-year pause on development** in the Arun Valley as part of an agreement that will safeguard local wetlands and wildlife.

Responding to the update on water neutrality, Tim Slaney, Director of Placemaking at the National Park Authority, said: "Thriving nature underpins our entire economy and wellbeing, so we're pleased that a positive way forward has been found around water neutrality that allows sustainable development while protecting our rivers, streams and biodiversity.

"We must continue to ensure that development conserves and enhances this treasured landscape and furthers our collective ambitions for cleaner, wildlife-rich waterways.

"This is going to require innovative solutions like we have seen in North Sussex.

"The new Local Plan is still evolving and the announcement will be taken into account in the next iteration of the plan due to be published for public comment in May 2026."

Any guidance that may be required for applicants submitting planning applications will be published on our website in due course.



In 2021, Natural England issued a water neutrality position statement in relation to the Arun Valley.

As a result, new housing

developments in parts of Horsham, Crawley and Chichester were paused.

This position statement was withdrawn in October 2025 because a solution has been found to protect the water source for the Arun Valley

## Evolving policies to deliver more affordable homes in Park



**Work is underway to adapt the National Park's policies around Rural Exception Sites to help deliver much-needed affordable housing.**

The sites are small and would not normally be granted planning permission but may come forward for affordable housing to meet the needs of local people.

Officers are now working to revise the Local Plan to evolve our RES policy and facilitate appropriate sites to come forward and support community-led development.

Amy Tyler-Jones, Planning Policy Lead, explained: "We recognise the vital role of rural exception sites in increasing affordable housing for local people in the countryside. A small site can make a big difference to a village, sustaining rural communities by enabling key workers and families to remain locally."

A key strand of the National Park's Partnership Management Plan – which lays out priorities for the next five years – is around collaborating with Parish Councils, Rural Housing Enablers and Registered Providers to deliver affordable, accessible, and low-carbon housing to support local communities.

Amy added: "The **Land Availability Assessment** has recently been updated – this is a useful resource for Parishes interested in explore what site opportunities there are locally. We are also developing guidance for Parish Councils on initial site assessment. There is also valuable support available from **Sussex Community Housing Hub** and **Action Hampshire**.

"We are drafting a match-making service to bring together affordable housing managers (known as Registered Providers) with development opportunities.

"Additionally, we provide **grants** to those building affordable homes on rural exception sites or through non-profit making organisations such as Community Land Trusts."

For further information please contact [affordablehousing@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:affordablehousing@southdowns.gov.uk)

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### Update on planning and placemaking in Lewes District

**Lewes and its local communities continue to be a hugely important part of the National Park since its creation 15 years ago and planning is at the heart of ensuring the area's continued vibrancy and prosperity.**



During that time some planning work has been delivered on the National Park Authority's behalf by Lewes District Council as part of a "Host Authority" contract and a number of successes have been achieved, including strong neighbourhood planning, much-needed affordable homes and the creation of new wildlife havens.

We have more recently been engaging and working more closely with the groups which represent the Town, including the Town Council, to help shape the future of the Local Plan and how it can continue to support this important town in the National Park. We also joined the Lewes Floods 25th Anniversary events to remember and learn from these devastating floods. We look forward to continuing these relationships and working together to deliver for Lewes.

In that vein and by mutual agreement the current contract with Lewes District Council is coming to an end on 31 March 2026, giving us the next two months to work together on a smooth and efficient transfer.

As the largest settlement in the National Park, we're looking at the potential of an area for the team to work from in Lewes to deliver this planning work.



We're aware of the unique nature of planning issues in and around Lewes and the interest they can generate. We're keen to ensure that planning delivers the best results for the people of Lewes and the National Park, having regard to the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans.

The SDNPA planning teams deal with applications across the whole of the National Park and six of the districts' entire planning workload are already handled by the National Park Authority. For more information see [www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-process/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-process/)

**FAQs have been produced** to help answer any queries during the transition period and they can be read here.

## Planning plays its part in huge nature restoration project



### A major Section 106 legal agreement has been signed to help deliver one of the biggest nature restoration projects in the UK.

The National Park Authority has signed a legal agreement with Halnaker Hill Farm, near Chichester, that will allow developers, businesses and individuals to invest in nature recovery.

Around 330 acres of land is being restored to its natural condition centuries ago, with a rich mosaic of wildlife habitats including hedgerows, grassland, ponds, woodland and wildflower meadows.

The land, previously intensively farmed and poor in nutrients, is already beginning to transform.

The scheme will deliver more than 850 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) units to help combat biodiversity loss and climate change.

The Section 106 agreement is the third to be signed by the Authority, with over 50 hectares of the Iford Estate, near Lewes, now formally dedicated to nature restoration.

Halnaker Hill Farm is owned by Halnaker Hill Natural Capital (HHNC).

Tim Slaney, Director of Planning, said: "National Parks are quickly becoming hubs for nature recovery and planning is at the heart of this movement.

"There's growing desire to invest in the environment among developers and businesses and this dovetails with an ever-expanding need in the land and farming sector to diversify and find new revenue streams. Both sectors can work harmoniously together and National Parks can be the facilitator.

"We're really excited about what we can achieve in the next few years."

As well as Biodiversity Net Gain for developers, businesses and individuals can buy Voluntary Biodiversity Credits. Please contact Sarah Westbrook, Nature-based Solutions Officer, at [Sarah.Westbrook@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:Sarah.Westbrook@southdowns.gov.uk)

## Planning cases over the past quarter in the National Park

Query	Total
Appeals submitted to the Planning Inspectorate	22
Appeals started	21
Appeals determined	30
Appeals successfully defended	15
Statutory submissions received	898
Statutory submissions received via the Planning Portal	769
Statutory submissions determined	962
Neighbours notified	4,761
Representations received	1,228
Consultations issued	2,348
Conditions imposed	3,417
Enquiries for planning advice	203
Enforcement complaints received	154
Enforcement cases opened	119
Enforcement related site inspections	129
Enforcement notices served	3
Enforcement cases closed	93

(1 October to 31 December 2025)

### Congratulations to the National Park Authority's Planning Technical Support team!



The team, led by Carol Brown, were recently named as the top performing "Other Originating Authority" (OOA) for Q1 and Q2 of 2025-2026.

Under the Infrastructure Act 2015, the National Park Authority is designated as an "Other Originating Authority" – creating land charges in the form of conditional planning consents, CIL and S106 financial obligations, new TPO's, to name a few.

Well done to Carol and the entire team!

The sense of community within the teams and our residents. And it helps that I don't get shouted at by the public nearly as much as when I worked for a Local Authority!

### **What do you love about the South Downs National Park?**

As a populated, but rural park, you're never too far from green space and the opportunity to get out in nature, and the breadth of the Park means there's such a variety of landscapes to experience, from chalk grasslands, to hillforts to coastal cliffs.

### **Have you got any hobbies?**

I have a myriad muddle of different hobbies, but largely I enjoy gaming (video and board), model making and writing.

### **Currently reading/watching?**

Currently reading 'The Game Changers' by Tim Clare which discusses the development of games from Knucklebone dice and the Royal Game of Ur all the way up to modern hobby board gaming like Catan, Pandemic and Ticket to Ride.

### **Dream holiday destination and why?**

A cruise, though one that visits many ports, not weeks at sea. It's like staying in a nice hotel and waking up somewhere new to explore each morning.

### **Describe your perfect day (when not working, of course!)**

Heading down to the coast with my wife and son, strolling along the seafront at Southsea and getting some fish and chips for lunch to eat on the beach.

## **Planning Committees**

The next meetings will be held on 12 February, 12 March, 9 April and 14 May.

You can watch the meetings live or on-demand for up to six months after the meeting on our [YouTube channel](#)

Browse previous and upcoming agendas on the website [here](#).

### **Pic Credits:**

P2 Stanmer House by [Rwendland](#); P5 South Harting aerial by Chris Gorman; P7 by Anthony Hurren

## **Meet the planner....**



**For this edition, we catch up with Alex Pringle, the National Park's Transport Officer.**

### **Three words that sum up your job?**

Varied, Highways, Projects

### **What's your role in the planning team?**

Bit of a go-to for Transport and highway queries, along with a liaison and translator between the National Park and the Highways teams of the Constituent County Councils, and Brighton & Hove City Council.

### **What appealed to you about working for a National Park?**

It was an opportunity to work for an organisation working towards an improved future, rather than just continuing the status-quo. The opportunity to not be shouted at in the street so often was a bonus.

### **Can you describe your typical day?**

Given the scope of my role is quite varied, a typical day is hard to pin down. I can be working on transport and access issues with Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, or providing technical advice on development proposals or reviewing a County Council's Local Transport Plan or all of the above in the same day.

### **Best thing about working for a National Park?**