# THE SOUTH DOWNS - YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

## What's so special about the South Downs?

It's located in the most densely populated corner of the UK. The South Downs stretches east from ancient pastures and hanging woodlands of East Hampshire across West Sussex hills, wooded estates and heathland to the looming Seven Sisters cliffs in East Sussex.

The iconic landscape is best known for its ancient chalk downland. This man-made environment comes about by constant livestock grazing the chalk hills over thousands of years. The grazing checks the hardy scrub plants and this, combined with the poor soil, gives fragile native plants a chance to thrive. As the flora is so diverse, a vast array of creatures can live in this habitat, including rare butterflies and grasshoppers.

To the north of the chalk hills, heathland forms a warm, open habitat which is home to rare birds, snakes and lizards. The UK has 20% of the entire world's heathland, but it's vanishing at a startling rate as it is generally not looked after properly.

Unlike other 'wild' National Park landscapes, around 85% of the South Downs is farmland, with a high proportion of arable cropping.

## Is the South Downs a National Park now?

Not quite yet! On 31 March 2009 Hilary Benn, The Minister for the Government Department of the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (Defra) stated that he intended to confirm a National Park for the South Downs.

Some details regarding the boundary of the park went to a public hearing in August, so confirmation of the National Park and its boundaries is expected at some point between autumn 2009 and spring 2010.

In the meantime, the South Downs is protected by its status of two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is managed by the South Downs Joint Committee on behalf of the local authorities.

## So what will change?

The South Downs AONBs are currently managed by the South Downs Joint Committee (SDJC), a collaboration of 15 local authorities with Natural England created to manage the area whilst a decision on its designation was made. The SDJC works with annually agreed budgets and was never intended to be a permanent body.

The National Park will be managed by a National Park Authority (NPA), a permanent body which will be set up over the course of around 18 months. In the meantime, the South Downs will continue to be managed by the SDJC. The membership of the new NPA is currently being decided by Defra, but it will take into account local and national interests. The NPA is likely to have at least 29 members, including 15 representatives from local government, plus those appointed by the Secretary of State, which will include members of Parish Councils.

The new NPA will be the Planning Authority, but it may choose to delegate planning back to the local authorities. This has not yet been decided. The new designation will not mean that any privately-owned land will become public land and it won't affect Rights of Way.

# The South Downs National Park - vital statistics

## Do you know...

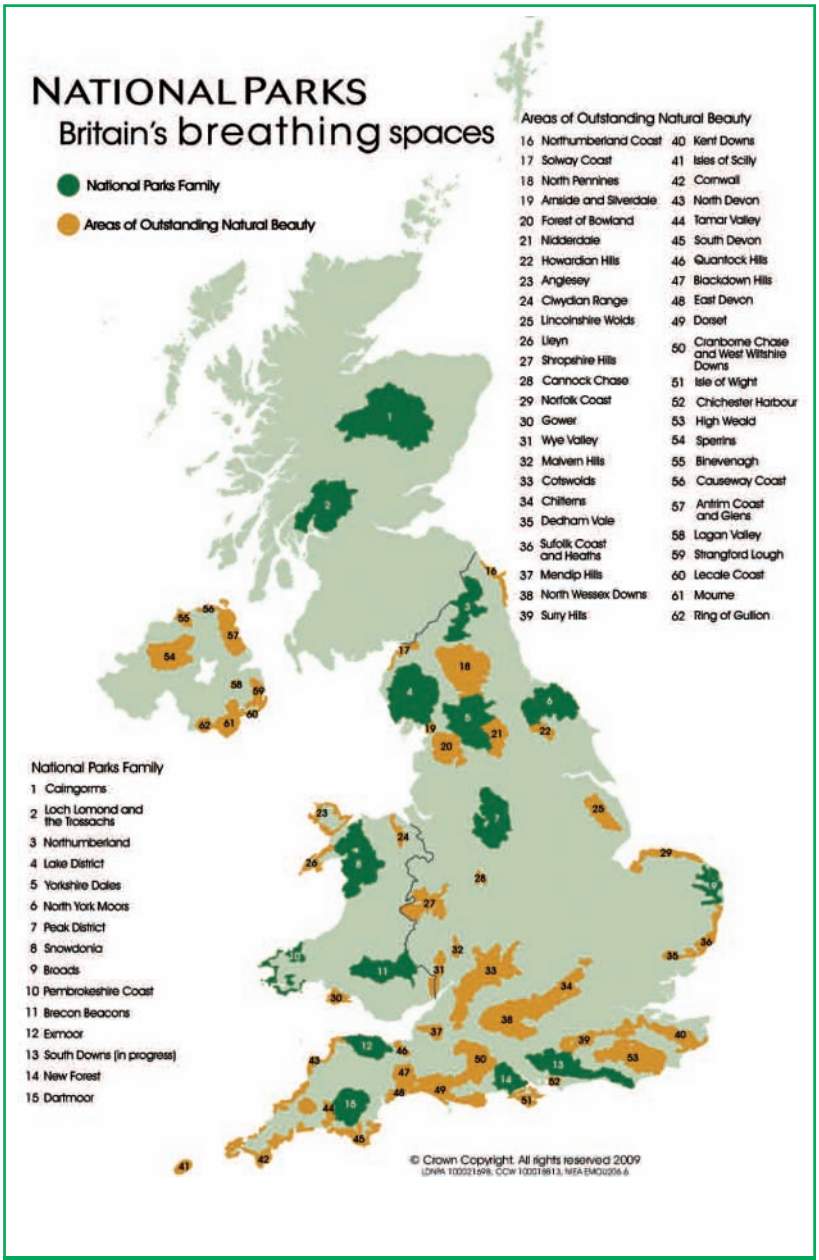
- How big? The proposed National Park boundary covers around 1624km$^2$ . That's more than four times the area of the nearby Isle of Wight at 384 km$^2$. However, it's not huge compared to other National Parks. It's less than half the size of the biggest, which is in the Cairngorms (3,800km$^2$).
  *Source: Association of National Park Authorities (ANPA)*

- How many people? It will be easily the most populated National Park with around 120,000 residents. 10 million people live within an hour's travel time of the South Downs and 39 million leisure trips were made to and within the South Downs in 2003.
  *Source: ANPA, Countryside Agency survey*

- The South Downs contains around 3200km of public rights of way, including the 160km South Downs Way National Trail which runs from west to east right across the protected area. There are also 9,883 hectares of publicly accessible land to explore.
  *Source: The South Downs Management Plan*

- About its history? There are 741 Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the South Downs, and people have been travelling the route of the South Downs Way for over 8,000 years, back to the Middle Stone Age.
  *Source: The South Downs Management Plan*

- Where to find out more? The South Downs contains two visitor centres, the Queen Elizabeth Country Park in Hampshire and the Seven Sisters Country Park in East Sussex. You can also visit www.southdownsonline.org




## The Protected Landscape Family

The South Downs is part of a wider family of:

- 40 UK Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- 14 National Parks (including the Norfolk Broads)
- 359 National Parks in Europe
- And…113,000 Protected Areas in the world! (that's about 6% of the Earth's land surface)

*Source: ANPA, The World Conservation Union, IUCN*

SOUTH DOWNS joint committee

As the transition to a National Park progresses, updated information can be found at:
South Downs Joint Committee website at **www.southdownsonline.org**
Defra website at **www.defra.gov.uk**
Natural England website at **www.naturalengland.org.uk**