

Victory for national park campaigners



by **Alex Jenkins**

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OVERJOYED campaigners this week celebrated as the South Downs became Britain's newest national park - while furious critics labelled the plans 'rushed' and 'wrong'.

The mixed reaction followed Tuesday's historic and long-awaited announcement from Secretary of State Hilary Benn that the 627-square mile tract stretching from Eastbourne to Winchester was to become the first new national park since 2005.

The official boundaries of England's ninth national park include the previously excluded Watersfield, near Coldwaltham, along with Woods Mill, near Henfield, Washington Common and a triangle of land at Clay Lane, Storrington.

The much fought over Western Weald area, from Petersfield and Liss to Midhurst and Petworth towards Pulborough in the east, has also been included along with Ditchling and

Lewes.

West Sussex County Council and Arundel and South Downs MP Nick Herbert have spoken out against the plan.

But campaigner for the South Downs Campaign Chris Todd said the announcement was 'absolutely amazing' and was a victory for democracy.

"It is more than we could have dared dream of," Mr Todd said.

"We thought we would get some of the areas as the arguments were very strong but we got nearly everything we were asking for.

"I think it is testament to the strong public support and I think it is a victory for democracy in the truest sense."

Robin Milner-Gulland from Washington Parish Council said everyone involved in the campaign was feeling 'pretty upbeat' following Tuesday's announcement.

In particular Washington is celebrating following the inclusion of its common - something residents had fought hard for.

"From our local point of view that is the result that counts," Mr Milner-Gulland said.

"I know we have not got



Tony Whitbread and staff celebrate Woods Mill victory

the bit north of the A283 and Steyning but that was not very much expected.

"It is a terrific result."

The hubs of major towns and villages such as Steyning, Bramber and the village of Upper Beeding have not been included in the park - much to the relief of

Upper Beeding residents Pat and Dave Nightingale who were concerned about poten-

tial tightening of planning regulations.

However two-thirds of Upper Beeding Parish has been included, with the National Park running behind the Rising Sun pub in Upper Beeding as well as including Edburton.

Upper Beeding residents Pat and Dave Nightingale wrote the submission argu-

ment for the Beeding parish.

"Half the parish is downland and that is in the national park," explained Mrs Nightingale.

"We hope we will see better protection for the downs.

"Although we had quite good protection from being in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, now instead of different authorities look-

ing after their areas they will have one unified authority making the decisions."

The Sussex Wildlife Trust has been one of the leading organisations involved in the South Downs Campaign.

This week it won two hard-fought battles as both its Woods Mill site near Henfield and the Western Weald bat site at Ebernoe,

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near Petworth, will benefit from extra protection.

Chief executive at Sussex Wildlife Trust, Tony Whitbread said: "We are pleased to have played a leading role within the South Downs Campaign and to have been successful in achieving our aim of getting a South Downs National Park.

"For us the icing on the cake must be the inclusion of our headquarters at Woods Mill in the National Park.

"Although not part of the original proposals we successfully argued that we should be included and have since bought more land in the area and improved its environmental management.

"For the trust it means we can do what we do already but even better.

"What we do here links within the whole landscape. It makes the point beautifully how the countryside fits together in the landscape.

"It looks like we have got a pretty extensive National Park which is exactly what we hoped for."

He added: "The work is only just beginning. Instead of campaigning for it we are trying to work together to make the downs the best they can be."

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