

# Job Done! National Park confirmed



*Robin Crane, Chairman of the South Downs Campaign holding the Confirmation Order with Hilary Benn MP in Ditchling*

On 12th November 2009, on a bright, crisp, autumnal morning, in Ditchling, the Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs, signed the South Downs National Park Confirmation Order.

This was the conclusion to a long and hard fought campaign and for many it has taken a while to sink in. It's been nearly 20 years since Robin Crane set up the South Downs Campaign to press for a National Park. Yet that doesn't seem all that long when you consider it's been over 60 years since the South Downs was first recommended to be a National Park. Even then the roots of the campaign can be traced back to the late 19th century when there were calls for a special body to manage the South Downs. A growing awareness of the need to look after our heritage led to bodies such as the National Trust being established.

The scale of success was overwhelming with the Campaign getting most of what it wanted

included in the National Park (see map on centre pages). The icing on the cake was the inclusion of the six additional areas that were consulted on last summer and the whole of Green Ridge in Brighton and the village of Offham, near Lewes, both of which had been split by the boundary announced in March 2009.

The Campaign had already learnt of its substantive success in March last year when Hilary Benn announced he was minded to create the National Park including the Western Weald, Ditchling and Lewes. This was no mean feat and testimony to the widespread public support and hard work put in by many, many volunteers supporting the Campaign.

The National Park is some 632 square miles, making it the third largest National Park in England. It covers an area greater than that covered by the two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Some small pockets of the two AONBs were not included in the National Park because they no longer met the statutory criteria. These were mainly around settlements on the edge of the Park, many of which had been developed.

The one recent disappointment was the loss of the open boundary to the sea. The Campaign had received widespread support for this proposal, including from the Inspector, but unfortunately could not persuade Hilary Benn.

Looking forward, the Confirmation Order has been signed and is the legal order which creates the National Park but it doesn't come into effect until 31 March 2010. On the same day the two AONBs will be de-designated. The National Park Authority will then be established in shadow form on 1 April 2010 and become fully functional a year later in 2011.

Now that the Campaign has achieved what it set out to do, it will be disbanding. While there is still much to be done to ensure that we get the best possible National Park, this will be the job of a new network. This is being established so that voluntary and community groups can continue to work together to ensure that the South Downs are passed on to future generations in a better state than they are now (see back page for details).



Campaign to Protect Rural England



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THE OPEN SPACES SOCIETY



Hampshire & Isle of Wight





view of the Downs from near Lodge Hill, Ditchling

## How will the National Park be managed?

The National Park will be managed by a National Park Authority (NPA), a permanent body with stronger powers and greater funding than a Conservation Board. This will mean that the NPA will be better able to conserve and enhance this internationally important landscape whilst also enabling greater enjoyment of the area. However, the NPA won't be established until April 2010 and fully functional until April 2011. In the meantime, the two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) will continue to be managed by the South Downs Joint Committee. When the AONBs are revoked in March 2010, the Joint Committee will continue to manage the same 'AONB' area until 2011.

The make up of the NPA board (see page 3 opposite) will be similar to that of the Joint Committee, except that Parish Councils will be represented on the NPA and give it greater local accountability. In order to be successful the NPA will need to operate in a collaborative and inclusive way with its partners.

### How will planning change?

For those areas already within one of the South Downs AONBs planning rules will be broadly similar. Those areas that have been included within the National Park but which currently have no national landscape designation will be subject to stricter planning rules. The important difference over current arrangements is that the NPA will have greater power and influence over planning decisions.

The NPA will be the planning authority for the area and will simplify planning by producing one Local Development Framework for the whole of the South Downs instead of the current 12. It should also bring greater consistency to the decision making process. The NPA may choose to delegate some of its development control work to local authorities in order to prevent it having to handle too many detailed planning applications. Many applications, particularly in urban areas, are unlikely to have a major impact on the wider landscape of the National Park. Whichever way planning is delivered the NPA will still be responsible for the decisions. If it did delegate this work it would need to be convinced that local

authorities were going to uphold its policies in a consistent and robust way.

National Park status will not stop further development, but it should ensure that it is in keeping with the surrounding landscape and protects the wildlife, culture and opportunities for quiet recreation.

### Will access change?

The South Downs already contains established rights of way and open access. None of these will change as a result of the area becoming a National Park and National Park status will not confer any new rights of access either. People are not free to wander wherever they want just because it is a National Park.

### Will the area be swamped by tourists?

As two AONBs, the South Downs already receives nearly 40 million visits a year. This is more than any other National Park in the UK. However, the majority of visitors are local people; they are not tourists from afar. The biggest increase in visitors is likely to arise from the growing population in the South East and therefore it will be essential to have a National Park Authority in place which is able to manage that demand. Some increase in visitor numbers, particularly longer stay visitors from further afield, is to be expected. This is likely to be a small proportion of the overall numbers, but these visitors are likely to spend more money in the area. Experience elsewhere has shown that National Parks bring significant economy benefits to the local community.

### When will we see a difference to the area?

Achieving change in the South Downs is going to take some time. It will not happen overnight, not least because the National Park Authority won't be fully functional until April 2011. Initially, the Authority will have to focus on deciding how it will operate and where it will be based before it can consider how to make a difference on the ground.

# Managing the Transition

Momentum is building fast now. The National Park designation is a reality and will take effect from 31 March. The National Park Authority will come into being on 1 April. So the pressure is on my small Establishment Team - newcomers as we are to an agenda that has energised the South Downs Campaign for decades - to help the fledgling Park Authority get off to a flying start.

We have lots of practical issues to resolve - getting the right sort of premises to operate from, as the staff complement builds up; getting finance, ICT and HR systems in place and so on. But the question that most preoccupies us is: how can the new National Park Authority best add value to the South Downs?

We have asked the views of voluntary groups, farmers and landowners, local authorities and community groups and more. All share a common passion for the Downs and want the National Park to be a success - whether or not they campaigned for it - and that is an excellent starting place.

We have found a strong desire for the new Park Authority to bring new leadership to protecting and enhancing this wonderful area:

- to help coordinate the efforts of the many organisations in the Park;
- to be in touch with local communities, helping them respond to their needs and develop their own capacity;
- to ensure good quality and well managed access to the Downs
- to build better understanding and links between town and country;
- to attract new and additional funding into the area to enhance its prosperity.

We have visited other National Parks, learning from what they do well and aiming to be best in class. But fresh thinking is needed for the South Downs. Our



Richard Shaw, Interim Chief Executive of the new NPA

National Park has a bigger population, is more intensively farmed and is surrounded by all the pressures of the south east of England. It contains sizable towns and has a huge resource in competent voluntary and community groups.

So our National Park Authority needs to be fit for the South Downs. And while most other National Park Authorities were created half a century ago, we have the opportunity to create a new, modern organisation, fit for the 21st century - not just an "authority" but strategic, enabling, partnering and light on its feet.

Not many expectations then! But who could wish for a better set of challenges?

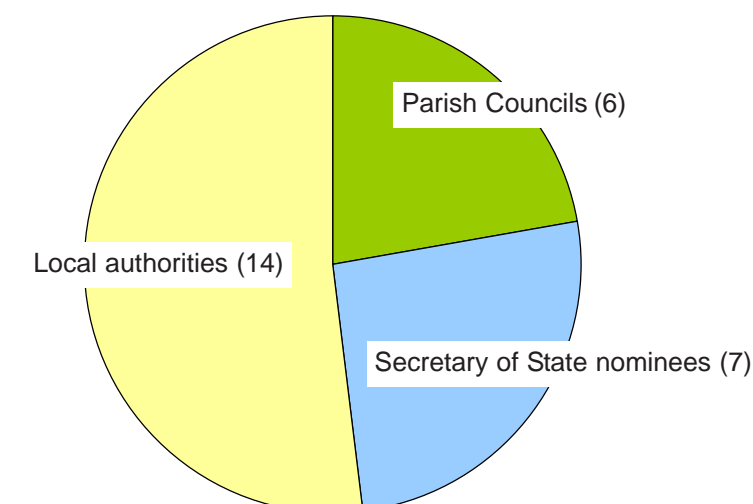
### Contact details for the Establishment Team

Email: southdowns@defra.gsi.gov.uk  
Phone: 01730 817285 (this may change)  
Web: www.southdowns.gov.uk

## The New National Park Authority

Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs, announced on 10 December 2009 that the new National Park Authority (NPA) will consist of 27 members and that local authorities would have a majority with 14 members (with Worthing and Adur Councils sharing a seat). There will be 7 members appointed by the Secretary of State to represent the 'national interest' (normally local people) and 6 Parish Council members (2 from each county).

Hilary Benn has stressed that he expects the new authority to place a lot of emphasis on community and stakeholder engagement. He also confirmed that once selected to serve on the NPA, members are expected to act in the best interests of the National Park in its entirety.





**Campaigners celebrate the news:**



**Western Weald**



**Ditchling**



**Lewes**

# A Brief History of the South Downs Campaign

The story of the South Downs Campaign goes back to the birth of some of its founding partners in the 1920s when there was a growing concern about the threats to our countryside. Out of this developed the pressure for the first National Parks in this country, resulting in the recommendation to Government in 1947 of the Hobbouse Committee that it set up 12 National Parks and that the South Downs should be one of them. Two years

later in 1949 the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act led to the first National Parks being created in the 1950s. Although the South Downs was meant to be in the second of three tranches of National Parks to be set up, it was one of the last to be considered in 1956. It was then turned down as a National Park on the grounds that its recreational opportunity had been lost due to intensive farming practices. Instead the South Downs was designated as two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); the East Hampshire AONB being confirmed in 1962 and the Sussex Downs AONB in 1966.

In the late 1980s, with reviews of both AONBs and National Parks under way and renewed public interest in a South Downs National Park, the impetus for doing something came from a number of quarters, including a member of the current Executive Committee, Paul Millmore.



Paul Millmore

This led to the South Downs Campaign being established at an inaugural meeting at the Sussex Wildlife Trust's headquarters in Woods Mill on 15 May 1990. The meeting agreed that local and national organisations should work together to press for a National Park and that Robin Crane, then chairman of the Sussex Wildlife Trust should be its chairman. The Campaign lobbied hard but a Forum established by East and West Sussex County Councils to debate the options of a National Park or a Conservation Board was undermined when the Countryside Commission proposed to give 50% funding for a Conservation Board for six years. Nevertheless the South Downs Campaign did not give up.



The ploughing of chalk grassland at Offham Down SSSI, near Lewes, just before the 1997 General Election raised the Campaign's profile

Quite independently, in January 1995, in Brighton, there was a local outcry at the proposed sale of Brighton's downland estate of around 13,000 acres (much like the recent proposals by Worthing Borough Council). This led to individuals and groups coming together to form an organisation called Keep Our Downs Public. During its fight with the Council it raised political awareness that the public wanted to

see the South Downs properly protected and looked after and didn't want to see the South Downs sold off for short term gain. This led to the sale being abandoned. In the process the Council was persuaded to support a National Park. Politically this came at a crucial time.

With the success in Brighton, campaigners who wanted to ensure the South Downs had greater long term protection joined the South Downs Campaign. This helped to give the Campaign renewed vigour and profile, and when a farmer ploughed up land restored as chalk grassland near Shoreham it caused a small storm. A week later and only 3 weeks before the 1997 General Election, farmer Harmer at Offham Down, near Lewes ploughed up a Site of Special Scientific Interest and the small storm erupted into a national outcry. With a visit to Offham Down by the future Environment, Minister Michael Meacher MP, and Tony Blair MP being questioned on the issue when he visited Sussex University, the South Downs National Park was placed firmly on the national political agenda.

After the General Election the Campaign lobbied Government and strongly criticised the Countryside Commission's report that rejected proposals for a South Downs National Park. The creation of the Countryside Agency presented a new opportunity and Michael Meacher asked the Agency to look at the issue again. It duly did and in April 2000 agreed to start the designation process for the South Downs.

With this news, the Campaign realised it had to take its work to a new level. Although it had won a great victory in securing the start of the designation process, all could still be lost if the National Park did not cover a wide enough area. Indeed there was a risk that an Inspector might not recommend there be a



Campaign for National Parks' Walk near Winchester with Sir Chris Bonington in 2002



Chris Todd

National Park at all. Therefore, the Campaign had to secure funding to allow it to employ an officer to help it raise its game.

Initially, the Campaign was successful in getting a two year grant from a local charity, the Earnest Kleinwort Trust, which, with match funding from its major backers, allowed it to employ Chris Todd. Employed for 20 hours a week, his job was to coordinate the activities of the Campaign and to build on its success. There were a number of challenges, such as the need to expand the Campaign's membership, to integrate properly the Sussex and Hampshire ends of the Campaign and to influence the Countryside Agency's boundary setting process. At the time it was thought that the process would be completed in a couple of years or so! However, for a number of reasons, that was to prove highly optimistic.

The Agency's boundary consultations began in 2001 and took longer than expected, mainly because the process was very thorough indeed. The Public Inquiry then dragged on rather longer than planned. A third and extensive delay came about as a result of the New Forest National Park decision and the legal challenges that followed. These led to the Government passing

legislation to clarify the law to allow the South Downs designation process to be re-started. A second public inquiry followed, which resulted in areas at risk of being left out (Western Weald, Ditchling and Lewes), being included in the National Park after a hard fought battle by the Campaign.

The delays put a strain on the Campaign's finances. Fortunately it secured substantial funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, which allowed it to complete its job so successfully.

It is also eternally grateful to smaller charitable bodies such as the Gatliff Trust and its many members and supporters who gave so generously of time and money and who are too numerous to list.

With the Confirmation Order signed on 12 November, 2009, the Campaign's job is done and it is now looking to wrap up its activities before 31 March 2010. It is has been a long, hard

journey, with many highs and lows along the way. With the length of time that the process has taken to complete, the Campaign has lost a number of good friends along the way. It has also seen so many Government Ministers reshuffled it has lost count! Particular thanks must go to Chris Todd for his outstanding work as Campaign officer and to members of the Executive who have worked tirelessly over the years and some like Robin Crane continuously.



Western Weald Day in Petersfield with Michael Mates, MP for East Hampshire (July 2008)

## Recent History Key Dates

**April 2000** - Countryside Agency agrees to designate South Downs National Park (SDNP)

**March 2001** - Area of Search produced (area within which National Park to be found)

**November 2001 / February 2002** - Countryside Agency public consultation on draft boundary

**May / August 2002** - Local Authority consultation on revised boundary

**18 December 2002** - Countryside Agency signs Designation Order

**January 2003** - 3 month consultation on SDNP Designation Order

**10 November 2003 / 23 March 2005** - Public inquiry in Worthing

**28 June 2004** - Government announces that New Forest will become a National Park

**3 November 2005** - Meyrick Judgment (on New Forest) throws designation process into disarray

**8 February 2006** - SDNP designation process put on hold due to Meyrick Judgement

**31 March 2006** - NERC Act 2006 receives Royal Assent clarifying definition of 'natural beauty'

**2 July 2007** - Designation process restarted with publication of Inspector's first report and new consultation

**12 February / 4 July 2008** - Re-opened SDNP public inquiry held in Worthing

**31 March 2009** - Secretary of State announces intention to create a SDNP and consults on 6 new additional areas including Alice Holt Forest and Castle Goring

**18 August 2009** - Inquiry re-opens in Worthing (for one day only)

**12 November 2009** - SDNP Confirmation Order signed in Ditchling

**10 December 2009** - Government announces size and make up of new National Park Authority.



Ditchling campaigners outside re-opened inquiry in Worthing in February 2008

# New South Downs Network

With the Campaign's job now complete with the successful achievement of the National Park, the Campaign will be disbanding. However, the Campaign's many members will still be around and interested in the South Downs. They have decided to set up a new network to continue the very successful partnership working that has evolved over the life of the Campaign. The network will not be quite so public facing as the Campaign but aims to ensure that organisations can continue to share information and work together to support enhancements and to fight damaging proposals.

The Campaign believes that the network will be important to ensure that pressure is maintained for greater protection and enhancement of the South Downs. It is urging its members to sign up to the new network so that they can be kept informed with what is happening elsewhere in the Downs while also keeping

the network apprised of what is happening in their local area.

The network is open to all voluntary and community organisations which support the two National Park statutory purposes (Section 61, Environment Act 1995):

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Parks; and
- to promote opportunities for the public understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Parks.

## Network Contact Details

To sign up or to find out more information, contact Jacquetta Fewster of the South Downs Society (which has kindly agreed to host the administration of the network) on 01798 875073 or email: [downsmen-d@btconnect.com](mailto:downsmen-d@btconnect.com)

## Challenges and Opportunities

There is no doubt that even with the designation of the South Downs as a National Park, there will be pressures and opportunities which will need to be resisted and grasped if the South Downs is to be safeguarded for future generations. Much of the pressure will come from the increasing population and economic development in the area, but there will be many issues around climate change and food and energy security amongst others. While more people living in and around the area will be a challenge in terms of managing demand it could also be an opportunity. The importance of the countryside in helping people relax and in keeping fit is increasingly being recognised as important in preventing physical illness and promoting mental well-being. This could lead to more investment in the rights of way network for example with better provision for access into the countryside without having to use a car.

Climate change is going to be a big issue for the Downs on a number of fronts. With the fragmentation of many habitats, particularly the internationally rare ancient chalk grassland, many wildlife species could be at risk as temperatures rise. Yet by working with partners such as farmers and landowners, the National Park Authority could start reconnecting these habitats so that species are able to move to cooler areas. That way, while things will



*Pylons over Southwick Hill - could offshore wind farms lead to the undergrounding of these lines?*

change, existing species will not automatically be lost and many will be able to survive, conserving the interest and diversity on the Downs.

Another threat and opportunity from climate change and energy security is the drive to produce more of our energy from renewables. While large scale wind turbines are a threat to the landscape if sited within the Downs, other forms of renewable energy are not necessarily. For example, increased use of wood (as a renewable resource) in boilers could lead to better management of our woodland. While off-shore wind turbines, such as being mooted around Shoreham and Brighton, could relieve the pressure for turbines on the Downs but could bring new pressures for more power lines to connect to the National Grid. Yet this could also be seen as an opportunity to

get new and some of the existing power lines put underground and so benefit the landscape.

Looking towards the future, it will be necessary for threats also to be seen as opportunities and for all those with a stake in the Downs to continue to work together for the greater good. It's a challenge that won't be easy but one that all parties must strive towards if we are to make the most of the opportunities that the new National Park presents.

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