The South Downs National Park: fact sheet

National parks

• Britain’s 15 National Parks are large areas of spectacular landscape that include mountains, meadows, moorlands, woods, coasts and wetlands.

• Known as ‘Britain’s breathing spaces’, National Parks are areas of countryside that are protected by law so that everyone can visit and enjoy.

• National Parks are not owned by the nation or managed only for their wildlife; they are mostly farmed landscapes where people live, work and shape the landscape.

• The South Downs became a National Park on the 31 March 2010 making it the newest National Park and the tenth in England to be designated.

• Covering an area of over 1600 square kilometres, and stretching from Hampshire to East Sussex, the South Downs National Park is the sixth largest National Park in the UK. Those larger include Cairngorms, Lake District, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, Snowdonia and the Yorkshire Dales.

• South Downs National Park is the only National Park which contains a complete National Trail within the Park boundaries. The famous South Downs Way stretches the entire 160km length of the Park, from Winchester in Hampshire to the white cliffs of Beachy Head near Eastbourne.

• The South Downs National Park differs greatly from all the other UK National Parks in that it has the largest population living within it, with over 108,000 residents.

• The Park includes the towns of Petersfield, Midhurst and Lewes. Many people visit the area from the nearby coastal towns and cities such as Brighton, Chichester and Eastbourne. London is less than an hour away.

• Approximately 85% of the land within the South Downs National Park is agricultural, 14% is non-agricultural and 1% is urban.

• The Park’s geology combines the greensands and clays of the Weald with the chalk of the downlands.

• The geology provides the foundation for large tracts of internationally important ancient woodlands, open heathland and the famous rolling downlands that lead to the iconic, sheer cliffs at Seven Sisters and Beachy Head.

• The South Downs National Park contains over 3000km of footpaths and bridleways.

• The highest point in the South Downs National Park is Blackdown. At 280m it is also the highest hill in county of Sussex.