

# Changing Chalk

*connecting nature, people and heritage*

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National  
Trust

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## ***Changing Chalk partnership leaves lasting legacy for nature, people and heritage across the eastern South Downs***

- 21 interconnected projects delivered through a 13-strong partnership
- Over 650 hectares of chalk grassland restored or improved for nature
- Over 50,000 people directly engaged over four years
- 30,000 volunteer hours contributed
- £147,000 awarded to 32 community projects through the Community Grants Scheme

Changing Chalk, a partnership bringing together 13 organisations, worked across the eastern South Downs, from Shoreham to Eastbourne, to restore globally rare chalk grassland, improve access to nature and heritage, and help more people feel connected to the landscape on their doorstep.

This major four-year programme, led by the National Trust and funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, has delivered lasting benefits for nature, communities and heritage across Sussex, with partners celebrating its impact as it comes to a close.

“Changing Chalk shows what’s possible when organisations, communities and funders work together at a landscape scale,” said Richard Henderson, Chair of the Project Board at the National Trust. “The programme has delivered real benefits for nature and for people. We hope its legacy will continue for years to come, with

communities continuing to enjoy, care for and feel connected to the South Downs.”

Stuart McLeod, Director of England - London & South at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: “Changing Chalk is a powerful example of what can be achieved when everyone comes together with a shared vision. Thanks to National Lottery players, this ambitious partnership has not only restored a rare and precious landscape but also created new opportunities for people to connect with nature and the heritage on their doorstep. Its legacy will live on not just in the transformed habitats but also in the lasting connections built with people and communities across the South Downs.”

### **Restoring chalkland biodiversity**

Over 650 hectares of chalk grassland, one of the UK’s richest yet most threatened habitats, have been restored or improved for nature, including sites such as the former golf course at Wilding Waterhall near Brighton. Work with farmers and landowners has improved grazing and habitat connectivity, helping wildlife to recover and thrive.

A further 50 hectares of wildflower habitat have been created at Gayles Farm near Seaford, transforming previously cultivated land into a haven for wildlife.

The programme also restored seven dew ponds and supported species recovery, including the translocation of 32 Wart-biter bush-crickets to establish a new population for this endangered insect.

### **Connecting towns and downs**

More than 50,000 people took part in activities designed to improve access to the South Downs and help more people feel welcome in the landscape.

Projects such as Farm School connected thousands of children with local farms, while Find Your Future supported young people facing barriers to build skills, confidence and pathways into nature and heritage. Wellbeing initiatives, including Growing New Roots, provided ecotherapy and nature connection activities to support mental health and build confidence.

“This has helped in ways medication and therapy couldn’t: being outdoors, connecting with others face-to-face, and learning new things have all built my confidence,” said a participant in the programme.

### **Hearts and histories of the Downs**

Through archaeology, creative projects and community-led activity, Changing Chalk helped people explore the rich and diverse heritage of the South Downs.

Initiatives such as The Big Dig and Monument Mentors enabled local people to uncover and protect the stories beneath their feet, while projects including Writing

Our Legacy @ Changing Chalk invited people from diverse backgrounds to explore their own connections to the landscape through creative expression.

Work with communities helped bring long-overlooked histories to light, including centuries of Gypsy and Traveller heritage, ensuring these stories are recognised and celebrated as part of the rich tapestry of South Downs' cultural identity.

## **Community and legacy**

Volunteers contributed over 30,000 hours, supporting conservation, learning and community activity across the programme, while the Community Grants Scheme awarded £147,000 to 32 projects, enabling grassroots organisations to connect people with nature and heritage and widen participation across the South Downs.

Although the programme is drawing to a close, its impact will continue through ongoing partnerships, community involvement and a shared commitment to caring for the landscape.

A new [film](#) captures the voices, stories and places at the heart of Changing Chalk, highlighting what has been achieved and what will continue beyond the life of the programme.

The four-year programme was supported by a £2.23 million grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and made possible thanks to National Lottery players. It was also supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery, The Linbury Trust and other generous supporters.

## **Notes to editors**

A full end of project report is available to view here: [Changing Chalk: From Vision to Legacy-end of project report](#).

### **About the Changing Chalk Partnership**

Changing Chalk was a four-year partnership programme (2022–2026) led by the National Trust, working across the eastern South Downs to connect nature, people and heritage.

The programme delivered 21 interconnected projects focused on restoring chalk grassland, improving access to the landscape and supporting communities to engage with the Downs and its heritage.

The project covered a 458 sq km area across the eastern South Downs, including Brighton and Hove, Lewes, Eastbourne and the surrounding downland.

The partnership brought together conservation organisations, farmers, research institutions, community organisations and local authorities, demonstrating the value

of collaborative, landscape-scale working to address long-term environmental and social challenges.

The Changing Chalk partnership comprised 10 core partners and was led by the National Trust:

Brighton & Hove City Council  
Brighton & Hove Food Partnership  
Buglife  
Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council  
Living Coast Biosphere  
National Trust (lead partner)  
Natural England  
Railway Land Wildlife Trust  
South Downs National Park Authority  
Sussex Wildlife Trust

In addition, the following delivery partners provided specialist activity across specific projects:

Historic England  
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew  
Writing Our Legacy

The partnership also worked closely with community organisations and other stakeholders to co-create and deliver activity across the programme.

### **Changing Chalk themes**

Changing Chalk was delivered across three themes:

#### Restoring Chalkland Biodiversity (Nature)

Supporting farmers and landowners to improve the condition, connectivity and long-term management of chalk grassland.

#### Connecting Downs and Towns (People)

Improving access to the South Downs and supporting more people to experience, enjoy and benefit from the landscape.

#### Hearts and Histories of the Downs (Heritage)

Working with communities to explore, share and celebrate the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the South Downs.

### **Social media**

#ChangingChalk

<https://www.facebook.com/NationalTrustTheSouthDowns>

<https://www.instagram.com/southdownseastnt>

### **About The National Lottery Heritage Fund**

As the largest dedicated funder of the UK's heritage, The National Lottery Heritage Fund's vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future, as set out in its strategic plan, *Heritage 2033*.

Over the next ten years, the Heritage Fund aims to invest £3.6 billion raised for good causes by National Lottery players to bring about benefits for people, places and the natural environment.

The Heritage Fund helps protect, transform and share the things from the past that people care about, from popular museums and historic places to landscapes, wildlife, languages and cultural traditions.

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[www.heritagefund.org.uk](http://www.heritagefund.org.uk)

### **About the South Downs**

The Changing Chalk programme focused on the chalk ridge stretching from Eastbourne to Shoreham, bordering the towns and cities of Brighton and Hove, Lewes and Eastbourne.

Much of the project area lies within the South Downs National Park, a landscape recognised for its natural beauty, cultural heritage and opportunities for access and recreation.

The South Downs have been shaped over thousands of years by human activity. The species-rich chalk grassland, which dates back around 6,000 years, is one of the UK's most important habitats. The landscape also contains a wealth of archaeological features, including burial mounds, ancient settlements, hillforts and evidence of more recent history.

### **About the National Trust**

The National Trust is a conservation charity founded in 1895 by Octavia Hill, Sir Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley to protect the nation's heritage and open spaces for everyone.

Today, the charity cares for places across England, Wales and Northern Ireland so that nature, beauty and history can thrive.

The National Trust looks after more than 250,000 hectares of countryside, 780 miles of coastline and over 500 historic houses, gardens and nature reserves.

It is supported by more than 5.7 million members and over 44,000 volunteers. For more information visit: [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)