

OUR SHARED OBJECTIVES

The South Downs Joint Committee and the Forestry Commission will work together in partnership to deliver their shared priorities. We will do this by:

Ensuring effective liaison

- We will hold an annual meeting between Forestry Commission and Joint Committee staff, building on the regular liaison that has resulted from the South East AONBs Woodlands Programme.
- The Forestry Commission will continue to provide officer representation on the South Downs Woodland Group and the West Weald Woodland Project, and will work with the Joint Committee to develop the proposal of a South Downs Woodland Officer to assist in the delivery of our shared objectives.
- The Forestry Commission will fully consult on the management of its own estate during the preparation of long-term Forest Design Plans.

Assistance in the review of the South Downs Management Plan

- The Forestry Commission will provide guidance on the preparation of the South Downs Management Plan. We will seek to ensure positive woodland policies that are consistent with the England Forestry Strategy and the Regional Forestry Framework.

Ancient woodland protection

- We will encourage and work in partnership with local authorities to revise the Ancient Woodland Inventory for the South Downs, to increase the understanding and protection of this resource.

Develop opportunities for woodland produce

- We will encourage the management of woodland by developing market opportunities, including the South Downs Brand, and will investigate the potential of high quality local produce with environmental accreditation.
- We will continue to work with partners across the South Downs in the promotion and development of the wood fuel industry, building on the work of the Natural Light Partnership and the BioMap project.

Targeting management of resources

- We will work together to provide woodland management advice to owners and managers, and will continue to promote an annual South Downs woodland day, concentrating on the protection or enhancement of areas of ecological importance or archaeological significance.
- We will continue to work towards the restoration of plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) where appropriate and encourage local or regional utilisation of this timber.

Greater awareness of woodlands and their usage

- We will work together to raise the awareness of the role of trees and woodlands in the South Downs, including their cultural and ecological importance, and the benefits of the woodland environment to health, and will encourage and support archaeological surveys of woodland by partner organisations.
- We will encourage landowners to maintain deer populations at appropriate levels.
- We will work to promote high quality access provision throughout the Downs, building on Forestry Commission/ Countryside Agency-funded research on accessible natural greenspace in the South East.



The South Downs

The South Downs is a nationally and internationally important area, containing some of the best-recognised landscape features and localities in the country. The Downs offer immense diversity and contrasts, with dramatic chalk cliffs, rolling downland, wooded scarp and winding river valleys.

The South Downs comprises the Sussex Downs and the East Hampshire AONBs, that together stretch from Eastbourne to Winchester. Part of three counties - East Sussex, West Sussex and Hampshire - it is one of the largest protected landscapes in England and Wales. Its designation as the South Downs National Park (awaiting confirmation), covers 1,641 sq km.



The Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission is the government department responsible for forestry in Great Britain. It works to ensure the protection and sustainable management of our woodlands.

The South East region's forestry framework, 'Seeing the Wood for the Trees' is the regional expression of the England Forestry Strategy. Produced in partnership with a range of stakeholders, it aims to provide the direction and context for the future development of woodlands and forestry in the South East.

For further information, contact:

South Downs Joint Committee
Victorian Barn, Victorian Business Centre
Ford Lane, Ford
Arundel
West Sussex
BN18 0EF

Tel: 01243 558700
info@southdowns-aonb.gov.uk
www.southdowns.gov.uk

Forestry Commission
South East England Conservancy
Alice Holt
Wrecclesham
Surrey
GU10 4LF

Tel: 01420 23337
fc.seeng.cons@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
www.forestry.gov.uk



A LOCAL ACCORD

Between the South Downs Joint Committee and the Forestry Commission



A JOINT ACCORD

Following the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) an accord was established between the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Forestry Commission in England.

The shared priorities were identified as:

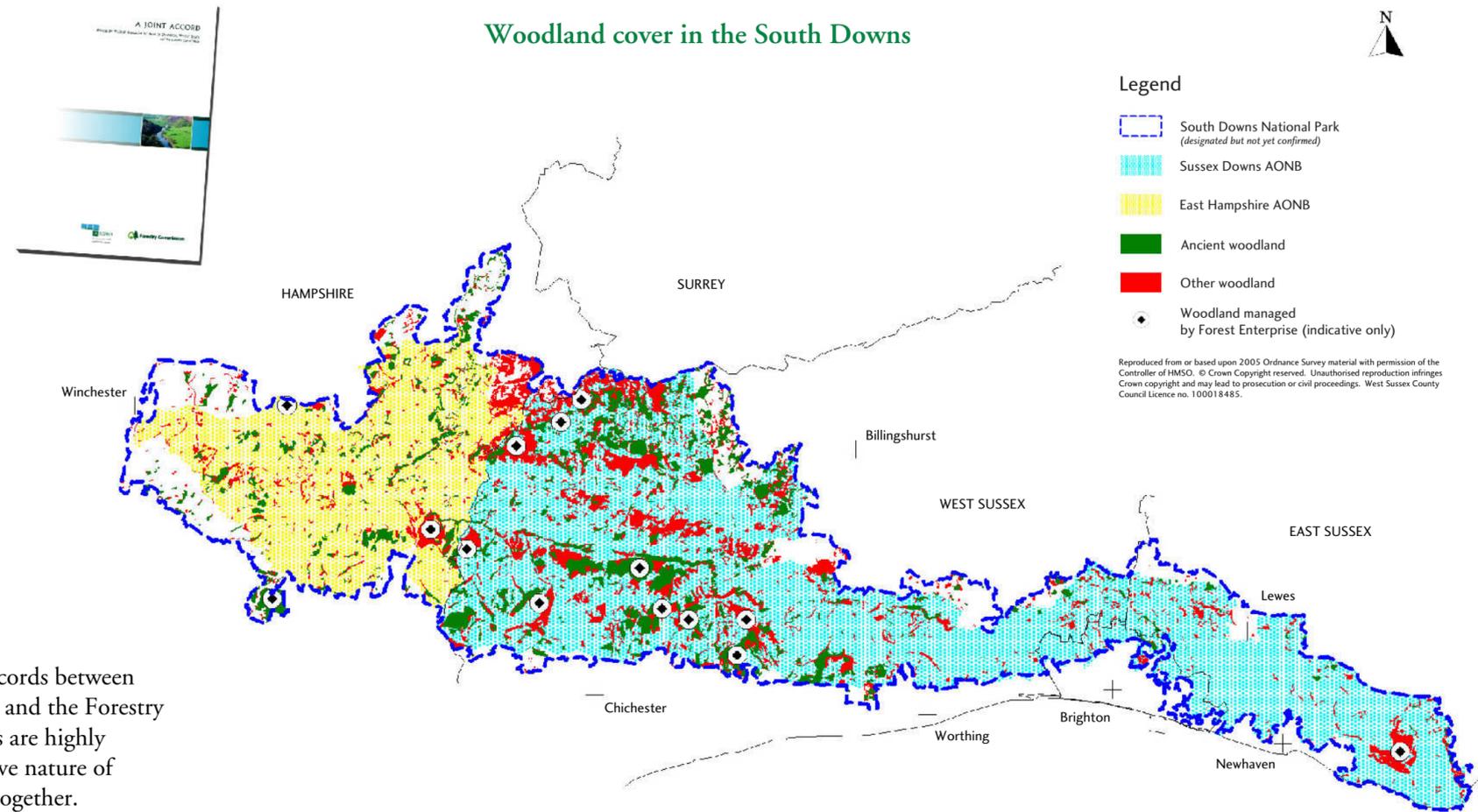
- Securing an attractive and sustainable landscape
- Protection of existing woodlands
- Reversing the fragmentation of ancient and semi-natural woodlands
- Promoting appropriate management practices
- Gaining public confidence and support

A LOCAL ACCORD

The Joint Accord encouraged the establishment of local accords between individual Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and the Forestry Commission where both parties agree that woodland issues are highly significant. These local accords seek to reflect the distinctive nature of each AONB, highlighting new opportunities for working together.

Following a number of woodland projects within the South East family of AONBs (supported jointly by the Forestry Commission and the Countryside Agency), it is now possible to identify the key issues included in this accord.

The purpose of this accord is to describe how the South Downs Joint Committee and the Forestry Commission will work together to meet their shared objectives



Legend

- South Downs National Park (designated but not yet confirmed)
- Sussex Downs AONB
- East Hampshire AONB
- Ancient woodland
- Other woodland
- Woodland managed by Forest Enterprise (indicative only)

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There is a rich, diverse mix of woodland cover in the South Downs, much of which is recognised as being of European importance. This includes some of the largest yew woodlands in England, steep valley sides cloaked in hanger woodland, and large woodland complexes in the Low Weald, supporting rare bat populations.

Woodland covers some 20% of the South Downs - half of this is ancient woodland

The South East AONBs Woodlands Programme arose out of the Joint Accord between the National Association for AONBs and the Forestry Commission. Since 2003, it has worked with protected landscapes in the South East, including the South Downs, to help define woodland priorities, and to put in place mechanisms for delivering agreed priorities. This work has helped inform some of the key woodland issues outlined below.

Key species

There is a need to target the populations of threatened woodland species in the South Downs. A particular focus is on the remaining populations of rare butterflies such as the pearl-bordered fritillary and wood white, both nationally declining species, and barbastelle and Bechstein's bats, internationally protected species with important colonies in the South Downs. The shared aim is to target land management advice, grants, and direct site management to help ensure the viability and expansion of these vulnerable species. The South Downs also supports the largest concentration of mature elms in the country, and a key aim is to continue to protect and manage these now uncommon trees.



Plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS)

Just under half of the ancient woodland in the South Down is PAWS. The Joint Committee and the Forestry Commission will continue to encourage the restoration of ancient woodland where appropriate by working in partnership with land owners and managers. The Joint Committee is also dedicated to working closely with the Forestry Commission's South Downs Forest Design Plan, which seeks to restore PAWS areas, other semi-natural habitats, and cultural landscapes.



Archaeology in woodland

The woodlands of the South Downs are rich in historical features, and archaeological surveys have led to some important discoveries. However, the extent and diversity of this resource is not fully understood or recorded. The South Downs Joint Committee, together with partners, is now looking to survey further woodland areas, and in particular aims to help protect and increase the understanding of this important aspect of our cultural heritage.



New markets to support woodland management

The decline in traditional woodland markets has led to a corresponding decline in woodland habitats and species dependent on ongoing management, as well as the loss of key woodland skills. The South Downs Joint Committee and the Forestry Commission are working with partners to improve the market opportunity for woodland products, and to identify and promote new initiatives to support woodland management. Work has included supporting wood fuel projects, promoting products such as charcoal under the South Downs brand, and encouraging the utilisation of locally-produced timber in buildings.



Deer management

The effect of high deer numbers is one of the most pressing issues for woodland conservation in the Downs. Deer browsing is affecting natural regeneration in woodlands as well as having a knock-on effect on many species due to the reduced shrub layer and ground flora. The South Downs Joint Committee is working with partners to assess the potential of marketing venison through the South Downs Brand to improve the sustainable management of deer.

