

South London Downs National Nature Reserve

The Chalk Downlands of the new South London Downs National Nature Reserve (NNR) is a combination of land, owned and managed by the City of London Corporation and the London Borough of Croydon. The NNR area includes the following sites:

- Riddlesdown
- Farthing Downs
- Happy Valley
- Coulsdon Common
- Kenley Common
- Hawkhurst Wood
- New Hill
- Sanderstead to Whyteleafe Countryside Area (SWCA)

Croydon has the largest population of all the London Boroughs, its urban location emphasises the importance of areas which provide access to nature and open space is very important for this population. The new NNR is the third in London and with its location on the urban perimeter, it connects a large population with the natural landscape. The extensive area semi-natural Downland habitats, is the largest remaining in greater London. The NNR contains two Sites of Special Scientific Interest with the land outside of equally important habitat, mostly managed within agri-environment schemes. The NNR area offers huge recreational opportunity and access to nature for some of the 385,346 (2018) people living in Croydon and populations beyond.

The NNR covers an area of 417ha, with a huge variety of habitats and species, including: Calcareous Grassland, Scrub Mosaic, Broadleaved Woodland, Mixed Woodland, Yew Woodland, Neutral Grassland. Key species include Greater Yellow Rattle, various Orchid Species, Speckled Wood Butterfly, Sliver-wash fritillary, Dogs Mercury, Rampion, Small Blue Butterfly, White Mullein, and Kidney Vetch.

Areas owned and managed by Croydon included in the NNR are

- Happy Valley (101.4ha)
- Hawkhurst Wood (14.3ha)
- Croydon owned fields of the Sanderstead to Whyteleafe Countryside Area (62.3ha)

Objectives of the NNR:

The two landowners will work in partnership, within available resource, to achieve the vision of the NNR by:

- Managing the NNR across ownership boundaries to harmonise the benefits of biodiversity, science and recreation;
- Working collaboratively to maximise positive management;

- Engaging local communities and visitors in the maintenance, enhancement and future landscape resilience of the NNR via volunteering, education, research and recreation;
- Developing long term monitoring programmes to increase understanding of the natural environment;
- Working collaboratively to provide opportunities to enhance the health and wellbeing of local communities and visitors through engaging and creative projects;
- Ensuring the NNR is appropriately recognised in local planning policies and local decision making;
- Sourcing external funding for collaborative projects that achieve the NNR vision;
- Enhancing landscape resilience, joining up with external sites to extend the reach of the NNR as opportunities arise.

The NNR's current boundary is owned and managed by The City of London Corporation and the London Borough of Croydon. Both organisations have a track record of conservation across these sites in their ownership. Both the City of London Corporation and Croydon Council are approved bodies by Natural England.

Natural England's involvement in the area is primarily through the protected sites and the management of the agri-environment schemes held by both land owners.

Natural England's new NNR strategy delivered in 2017 opened up an opportunity to improve the national network of NNR's. This NNR embodies the 4 key elements of the new strategy, contributing to conservation, environmental research, and access for people and building on partnerships. There are plenty of future opportunities in and around the NNR for health, wellbeing, education and nature conservation.

The NNR is a chance to strengthen engagement beyond the existing 'audience'. It will reconnect local people and those visiting from further afield. This includes physical connection, mental connection, interdependence between nature and people and the reliance on the services nature provides (clean air/water /soil/ flood protection etc.).

There could be potential for future collaboration with other adjacent landowners to improve the chalk downlands and connect with other adjoining boroughs including the London - Boroughs of Bromley and Sutton – as per the All London Green Grid Area 7 Framework www.london.gov.uk/file/465856/download?token=QGnONzpy