

South London Downs National Nature Reserve: Question and Answer briefing (Q&A)

What is the proposal for the South London Downs National Nature Reserve?

The proposal is to declare a 417ha of land along the border of Croydon and Surrey as a National Nature Reserve. The new National Nature Reserve will be the third in Greater London (Ruislip Woods and Richmond Park being the other two). With its unique location on the edge of a large urban area, it will represent and further underline the importance of this asset for the local people and wildlife.

What is a National Nature Reserve?

National Nature Reserves were established under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 to protect some of our most important habitats, species and geology and additionally provide 'outdoor laboratories' for research. They have the ability to inspire. They are places where protecting wildlife goes hand in hand with learning, understanding and enjoyment, whilst offering great opportunities for people to experience wildlife at first hand and to learn more about nature conservation. There are currently 224 National Nature Reserves in England covering 360 square miles (0.7% of England), managed by a range of organisations including Natural England.

Why is this land being declared a National Nature Reserve?

Situated on the edge of the urban area of the London Borough of Croydon and adjacent to the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Beauty, the National Nature Reserve will enable the land to continue to be managed in an exemplary way, particularly the chalk grasslands and the associated wildlife. A collaborative approach across a larger tract of land will allow landscape scale nature conservation to be better planned and help maintain the important lowland grassland, woodland and scrub mosaic that exists there. The National Nature Reserve has huge recreational potential and provides access to nature to the large urban population of Croydon living nearby. It also provides excellent opportunities for education and research.

Declaration as a NNR not only recognises the high recreation and conservation value of the area, but also the high standards of management expertise required to maintain that value. NNR declaration would increase the profile of the site, opportunities to celebrate the importance of the area to local people, and raise awareness and understanding of conservation work being undertaken.

What is the vision for the South London Downs National Nature Reserve?

The overarching vision is that nature is conserved, enriched and reconnected to people. The mission is to ensure the South London Downs National Nature Reserve thrives. The partners will act beyond boundaries, harnessing the power of partnership, combining passion, science and innovation to create resilient landscapes, rich in wildlife, where people can engage with the natural world.

Who will be responsible for the National Nature Reserve?

Natural England is responsible for declaring or un-declaring National Nature Reserves in England. Natural England has a statutory role to offer support and advice on the management plans for the National Nature Reserves.

The National Nature Reserve will be managed by two leading 'Approved Bodies': the City of London and London Borough of Croydon, who own the land within the National Nature Reserve. They will co-ordinate management, engage with local groups and the general public to deliver the objectives to achieve benefits for nature, recreation and enjoyment, inspiration and learning, health and wellbeing, and research.

At a national level, there is a NNR partnership, which Natural England co-ordinates, made up of cross organisational National Nature Reserve land owners and managers across the country who come together to help shape and deliver the partnership strategy.

What are the overarching objectives for the National Nature Reserve?

There are several agreed objectives for the National Nature Reserve:

- The landowners will work in partnership, within available resource, to achieve the vision of the National Nature Reserve by:

- Managing the National Nature Reserve across ownership boundaries to harmonise the benefits of biodiversity, science and recreation;
- Working collaboratively to maximise positive management;
- Put people at the heart of the National Nature Reserve, engaging local communities and visitors in the maintenance, enhancement and future landscape resilience of the National Nature Reserve 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 National Nature Reserve is appropriately recognised in local planning policies and local decision making;
- Sourcing external funding for collaborative projects that achieve the National Nature Reserve vision;
- Enhancing landscape resilience, joining up with external sites to extend the reach of the National Nature Reserve as opportunities arise.

Isn't there already a lot of protection for this land?

152.47 ha of the pNNR is protected as a nationally important Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for chalk grassland, a diverse variety of woodland, scrub mosaic and neutral grassland habitats. The area supports rare orchid species, yellow rattle and butterflies associated with chalk grassland. The new National Nature Reserve offers the opportunity to extend these sites to bring together land that is owned by different bodies. The bodies aim to manage the land in a co-ordinated way, including SSSI's and land with high wildlife value, but isn't currently notified as a SSSI. The National Nature Reserve will provide a unique opportunity for the London Borough of Croydon and City of London to work with others to create a collective vision for the wider landscape and provide additional benefits for wildlife and people, including education and research.

It is recognised that NNR status across ownership boundaries would present partnership opportunities that could bring benefit to the long-term management of the Commons and Happy Valley whilst providing a significant contribution to the Government's strategic desire to protect England's most precious natural assets.

How it is declared?

The Approved Bodies are required to officially commit to manage the National Nature Reserve. Natural England's Executive Board approves the declaration of National Nature Reserve under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. The proposal for the National Nature Reserve will be reviewed by the Natural England Board and a decision taken on whether to proceed or not. It will take several weeks for the National Nature Reserve to be confirmed as a National Nature Reserve by Natural England after this time.

How can I find out more about this?

The City of London Corporation

www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/city-commons/farthing-downs/Pages/default.aspx

London Borough of Croydon

www.croydon.gov.uk/leisure/parksandopenspaces/parksatoz/happy-valley-park

Natural England

www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-nature-reserves-in-england

Can I have a say about this?

Please contact the relevant organisations through the details provided on the websites above.