

Bats to benefit from National Park's grant scheme

Restoring a nationally-important bat roost, the story of a town's "lost railway", improvements to a nature reserve and a new community eco-shelter are among the exciting projects to benefit from a National Park fund.

A range of inspiring initiatives across Hampshire, West Sussex and East Sussex have been awarded grant funding from the Sustainable Communities Fund (SCF). The dedicated community fund is a partnership between the South Downs National Park Trust, the official independent charity for the National Park, and the South Downs National Park Authority.



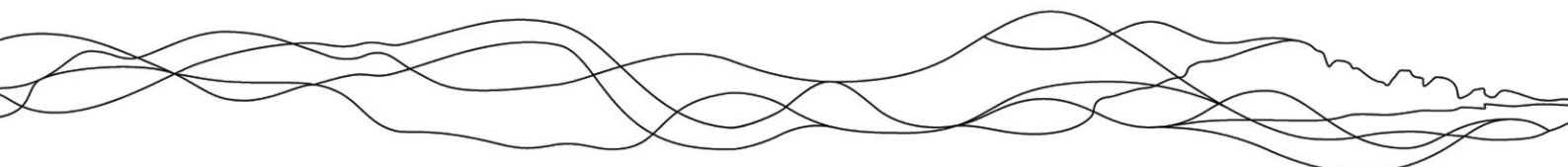
A grant of £10,000 was awarded to Sussex Bat Group and Vincent Wildlife Trust to renovate and maintain a barn in West Sussex that is a vital haven for the **greater horseshoe bat** (*undisclosed location due to extreme sensitivity of site*). Once a cave-dweller, this bat species is now very rare in the UK and tends to roost in old buildings, such as churches and barns. During the last century, greater horseshoe bat numbers fell by over 90 per cent in Britain. It's hoped the work will be a step closer to helping greater horseshoe bats return to their former ranges in southeast England.



the bats."

Daniel Hargreaves, Bat Programme Manager, said: "Greater horseshoe bats were once considered extinct in southeast England, so to discover a maternity roost in the South Downs National Park is incredibly exciting. It demonstrates that vulnerable species can bounce back if the habitat is suitable; this vital funding has helped secure this important roost and created a safe haven for

Just under £4,000 was awarded to a project at **Benfield Hill Local Nature Reserve**, in Brighton, to support the reserve's 30th anniversary celebrations. The grant will help provide two educational boards at the site, including information on chalk grassland habitat and wildlife.



Meanwhile, an initiative to create a **new community eco-shelter in Petersfield** will benefit from a grant of £10,000. A traditional wooden shelter, complete with a green roof, will be built at the community garden on the Adhurst Allotments to help encourage school visits and youth volunteering.

Just under £7,000 has been awarded to help produce four educational boards depicting the **history of Steyning & Bramber Railway stations**. The Steyning Line connected Horsham with the port of Shoreham-by-Sea, with connections to Brighton, for over 100 years until it closed in 1966. A route that was important for agricultural and industrial transportation, the line served the cement factory at Beeding and the brickworks at Southwater. It was also an important connection during the Second World War. It's hoped the education resources will help residents and visitors learn more about the railway's heritage and its impact on the area.

Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the National Park Authority, said:
“Volunteers and community groups are the lifeblood of the South Downs National Park. They give so much time, energy and dedication that benefits this treasured landscape, its communities and wildlife, but they often lack funds.



“This is where the Sustainable Communities Fund can make a real difference. We're pleased to be able to award these grants to a variety of really inspirational projects that will aid nature recovery, celebrate heritage and create wellbeing opportunities for people of all ages.

“I look forward to seeing how these projects progress over the coming years!”

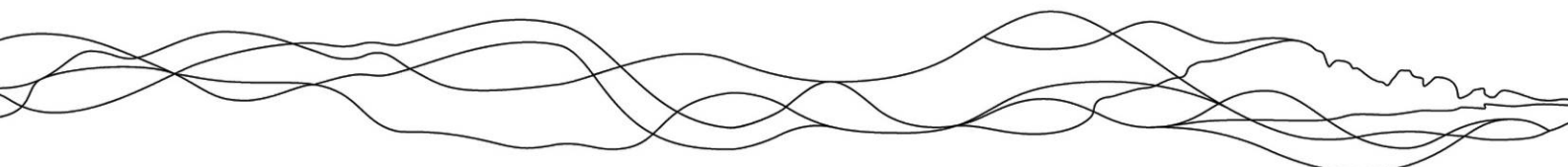
Applications for future SCF funding are being welcomed. For more information on the Sustainable Communities Fund and to find out about applying for a grant visit www.southdownstrust.org.uk/scf/

Notes to Editors

More information about greater horseshoe bats, the Sussex Bat Appeal and ways to donate can be found at www.vwt.org.uk/sussex-bat-appeal

About the Sustainable Communities Fund:

Any partnership or other not-for-profit organisations which include social enterprise, community interest companies, voluntary organisations and 'for profit' organisations (these projects cannot be



for financial gain to the business) can apply for funding if they believe their project is bringing social, environmental, economic or cultural benefits to a community within the National Park.

Grants are available for up to 50 per cent of the project cost from £250 to a maximum of £10,000.

Applications are considered by the Grant Panel, which consists of people from various sectors of the South Downs. Application forms are not available for download as we encourage an initial conversation about your project – please contact the External Funding Co-ordinator, Victoria Crespi, on 07471 997344 or grants@southdowns.gov.uk

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