



South Downs

National Park Authority

## BUSINESS PLAN

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**2011-12**





**Margaret**

**Paren**

Chair

More than 60 years ago the South Downs was identified as a potential future National Park. It has taken that long for the South Downs National Park to come into being. I have always believed that National Park status would benefit the natural beauty of the area, the communities and businesses within the Park and those who enjoy its qualities.

Our first non-operational year has been very busy as we have put in place the foundations for the future. Importantly, we have clarity of our funding for the next four years and that will help us determine the priorities for our first few years.

We have established the Authority with a governing body of 27 members, three-quarters of whom are elected local councillors from local authorities and parish councils in the South Downs, able to reflect the perspectives of a range of interests and communities. I pay tribute to them for the way they have taken up the challenge with great enthusiasm and commitment to shape the strategic direction of the National Park. We have established some important Guiding Principles, reflecting the views of many partners, which have shaped our decision making and our planning. These aim to ensure an organisation that is designed for the South Downs and that adds value. Where we felt it was appropriate, we have moved away from traditional methods of operation to ensure flexibility and to make the best use of the resources we have at our disposal.

The South Downs Joint Committee, which was funded by local authorities across the National Park area and Natural England, wound up in March 2011; a majority of its staff and assets transferred to the National Park Authority.

In line with our Guiding Principles we have emphasised the importance of working with others: individuals, partners, communities and other stakeholders. We are determined to ensure that we engage with others to help shape our vision and priorities for the National Park and, more importantly, to help deliver our shared aspirations.

We have begun the journey but there is a long way still to go. We are looking forward to developing our strategic plans for the National Park, completing the transition programme and ensuring our actions deliver on the ground.

I want to thank you all: Members, partners, staff and all those others who have helped us to reach this point. I hope we can continue to work positively together for the future of the South Downs National Park.



## **Richard Shaw**

Chief Executive

The South Downs National Park (SDNP) is England's newest National Park, covering the South Downs and Western Weald and situated in the counties of Hampshire, West Sussex and East Sussex.

The proposal for a National Park for the South Downs goes back to the original concept of National Parks in England in 1947, but it was only in 1999 that the Government announced consultation on its creation, and another decade passed before the idea became a reality.

On 31 March 2009, the Secretary of State announced his intention to designate the area a National Park, and on 12 November 2009 signed the order confirming the designation. The South Downs National Park formally came into being on 31 March 2010.

The National Park Authority came into being in April 2010, and the 2010/11 financial year was a transitional year. The Authority assumed its full operational responsibilities from April 2011.

The National Park Authority is committed to partnership working and the main priority for 2011/12 is to develop shared priorities for the South Downs together with partners and communities. In the meantime, this first Business Plan identifies the initial practical actions that the National Park Authority will take, where these are clearly important and supported by partners. These include the launch of a Sustainable Communities Fund which, consistent with our Guiding Principles, aims to encourage local community initiatives that support the National Park Purposes and Duty.

# South Downs National Park Authority

## Purposes and Duty

The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) has two Purposes:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area;
- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public;

And a Duty in support of these Purposes:

- To seek to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities.

## National Government Vision for the English National Parks and the Broads

In 2010 Defra published “*The English National Parks and Broads UK Government Vision and Circular 2010*”. This set out the vision that by 2030 English National Parks and the Broads will be places where:

- There are thriving, living, working landscapes notable for their natural beauty and cultural heritage. They inspire visitors and local communities to live within environmental limits and to tackle climate change. The wide range of services they provide (from clean water to sustainable food) are in good condition and valued by society.
- Sustainable development can be seen in action. The communities of the Parks take an active part in decisions about their future. They are known for having been pivotal in the transformation to a low carbon society and sustainable living. Renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, low carbon transport and travel and healthy, prosperous communities have long been the norm.
- Wildlife flourishes and habitats are maintained, restored and expanded and linked effectively to other ecological networks. Woodland cover has increased and all woodlands are sustainably managed, with the right trees in the right places. Landscapes and habitats are managed to create resilience and enable adaptation.
- Everyone can discover the rich variety of England’s natural and historic environment, and have the chance to value them as places for escape, adventure, enjoyment, inspiration and reflection, and a source of national pride and identity. They will be recognised as fundamental to our prosperity and well-being.

# Guiding Principles

During the six months prior to April 2010, extensive engagement took place with organisations and individuals throughout the National Park to seek views on their aspirations for the National Park and on how the Authority could best add value to the area.

On 13 May 2010 Members adopted Guiding Principles, reflecting these views, to inform decisions on the shape of the future organisation.

The guiding principles are:

- Champion the SDNP with inspiring, strategic leadership and priorities that carry wide support;
- Bring people together, acting as a coordinator for partners and community groups, to engage, inspire and achieve more for the South Downs through combined action;
- Influence policy making and the decisions at local, regional and national levels, acting as a voice for the SDNP and a source of knowledge and expertise;
- Deliver flagship projects, drawing down external funding and filling the gaps that others cannot fill and are too important to be left;
- Engage directly with local residents, farmers, land owners, land managers and visitors to understand their priorities and provide advice or support in helping achieve our shared aspirations for the South Downs;
- Encourage volunteering to support National Park Purposes and help strengthen communities; and
- Build effective partnerships to tackle the challenges facing the SDNP, including climate change, demographic change and development pressures.

# Subsequent decisions which have shaped the organisation

Our subsequent decisions have been consistent with the Guiding Principles. These include:

## 1. Planning

The SDNPA will be the statutory planning authority for the National Park, but we will carry out this function in partnership with the local authorities in the area. Most day-to-day planning services and the large majority of development control decisions will continue to be made by local authorities, on behalf of the SDNPA, under agency agreements. The SDNPA will determine only a small number of significant applications and will also develop a policy framework for the National Park.

- We aim to achieve improvements in the quality and cost of the planning service.

## 2. Countryside management, community and visitor engagement

Rangers working for the South Downs Joint Committee (which wound up in March 2011) transferred to the SDNPA from April 2011 – this was a priority for farmers in the area.

- Our rangers will support farmers in delivering environmental land management, accessing grant funding, and managing their interface with visitors.
- They will also support community initiatives to deliver the National Park Purposes and Duty.

## 3. Volunteering

As part of its commitment to encourage volunteering, the SDNPA invited the existing South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service to affiliate to the SDNPA. A ballot of volunteers resulted in overwhelming endorsement of the proposal.

- We will explore opportunities for widening and developing volunteering opportunities in the National Park.

## 4. Partnerships

The Authority is required to develop a National Park Management Plan setting out strategies and priorities for the South Downs. It has pledged to do so in partnership with others and is establishing practical arrangements to achieve this. There are number of ways in which it will do this including regular dialogue with the South Downs Land Management Group, the South Downs Network of conservation organisations, local councils and others.

- We are committed to working in partnership.

## **5. Premises**

The Authority carried out a survey to establish the views of residents and partners on criteria for selecting office premises. This showed strong support for the main office being located in a market town, within the boundaries of the National Park and as centrally as possible; in a building that reflects the character of the National Park and that can be refurbished to high environmental standards; and in a place with good transport links. Survey results also supported area offices to enable local working.

- We aim to complete the purchase of a headquarters building that in very large measure meets these criteria.

## **6. Staffing and outsourcing**

- The Authority will maintain a lean organisation with many corporate functions provided by partner local authorities in the area.

# Values

The SDNPA has agreed the following statement as an expression of the values that will govern the behaviour of its staff and Members:

Working for the National Park....

We will:

- have a common goal determined by the National Park's Purposes and Duty
  - champion the National Park's aspirations
  - communicate clearly and listen well
  - be flexible, encourage innovation and welcome challenge
- ....working together

We will:

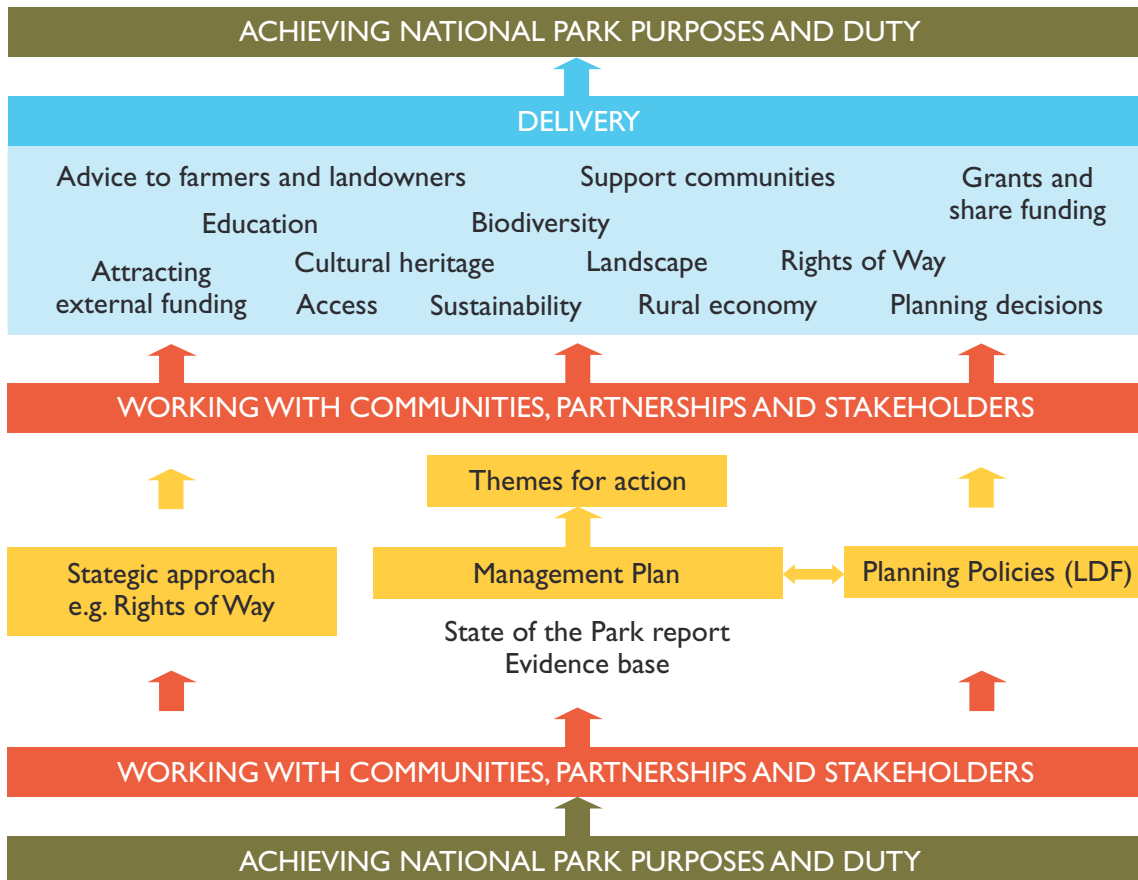
- trust and respect people within and outside the SDNPA
  - work in an open way
  - work as one organisation which is mutually supportive
  - be committed to working in partnership with others to develop shared priorities and gain mutual benefits
- ....to deliver results

We will:

- ensure our approach and decisions are informed by evidence
- be positive and enthusiastic: take the initiative
- be seen to add value in all that we do.

# Looking Ahead: Strategic and Operational Delivery

The work of the SDNPA is rooted in its statutory Purposes and Duty, and in its commitment to engage with local communities, partners and stakeholders. This year's Business Plan sets out the conclusion of the work in the transitional year to establish the Authority and put in place the building blocks for its work in the National Park.



# Objective 1

## **Work with communities and partners to meet emerging local and park-wide priorities that support National Park Purposes and Duty**

We are committed to basing our investment on sound factual evidence and a clear understanding of the priorities of local people and partners. It will take some time to develop this understanding, but in the meantime we are keen not to lose momentum but to support priorities identified by communities and partners that are clearly consistent with the National Park Purposes and Duty. We will therefore set aside resources in our budget to allow investment in these emerging priorities for the National Park and commit our staff to support their development and delivery. We will also recognise certain immediate priorities and take action during 2011/12, as set out below.

- We have launched a £400,000 Sustainable Communities Fund to support local initiatives that help achieve the National Park Purposes and Duty. Our Ranger Service will provide a first stop shop for advice and assistance on the development and delivery of local action.
- We will place emphasis on encouraging and supporting volunteering. An early project for 2011/12 will be to complete a review of volunteering arrangements across the National Park, in conjunction with partner organisations that operate volunteering schemes. The review will aim to increase and diversify opportunities for volunteering, and improve the coordination of volunteering opportunities, thereby helping to strengthen communities.
- The South Downs is a wonderfully beautiful area. It is also an actively farmed environment, and the role of farmers and land managers in caring for the landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage is vital. We will therefore work with Natural England and farmers to attract the maximum level possible of Higher Level Stewardship funding to the area and encourage good environmental practice.
- Many people enjoy the special qualities of the South Downs by walking or riding along footpaths and bridleways, and we will seek to improve the management of access. We will establish a Local Access Forum for the South Downs National Park, involving a range of partners, to provide to advice on how access can be improved and better managed. As part of our approach to access, we will seek to develop a partnership with the Highway Authorities to support improved management of the rights of way network and to develop a strategy for the South Downs Way that will improve management and identify new opportunities.
- In some parts of the countryside, especially those close to urban settlements, inappropriate or antisocial behaviour by visitors to the countryside causes disruption or damage to farming activities and leads to tensions between farmers and visitors. We will work with farmers, visitors and other partners to identify the nature of the problems and potential solutions. We will aim to develop at least one pilot scheme to test solutions.

## Objective 2

### **Define the most important strategic priorities and actions for the South Downs National Park by working effectively with partners and stakeholders to develop the National Park Management Plan**

The SDNPA is required to adopt a National Park Management Plan within three years, that will guide the delivery of the National Park Purposes and Duty. We are committed to developing the plan with the active participation of partners and the wider community, encouraging shared ownership of the objectives and priorities and the practical support of partners for their delivery. We are also committed to ensuring that this work is informed by sound and comprehensive factual evidence about the condition of the National Park.

- During 2011/12 we will ensure that partners and stakeholders can participate fully, giving everyone the opportunity to express their views and shape the emerging priorities for the National Park. We will establish a South Downs National Park Forum, supported by regular information and networking opportunities, arrange workshops on particular topics and establish a partnership to guide the development and delivery of the National Park Management Plan.
- We will review existing evidence about the condition of the National Park, commissioning new evidence where there are gaps, and work towards publication of a State of the National Park report.
- By the end of the year we will have a clear understanding of the priorities for the National Park and will be developing strategies for action with our partners.

## Objective 3

### **Deliver effective and efficient planning services that support the National Park Purposes and Duty**

From 1 April 2011 the SDNPA is the statutory planning authority for the whole of the National Park area. This is a significant part of our work and means we will become the 8th largest planning authority in England.

We have found strong support from local authorities, land managers and other partners for the delegation of a large part of the decision making in relation to planning applications and other related planning services such as enforcement to the 15 local planning authorities in the National Park area. This should make it easier for local people and organisations to apply for planning permission and comment upon planning applications in their locality. It will also enable the SDNPA to play a more strategic role consistent with its Guiding Principles.

- We will therefore aim to introduce an agency agreement with each local authority that will enable them to determine the large majority of applications on our behalf, and to take the lead in providing day-to-day planning services. We will ourselves directly determine a small number of major or significant planning applications.
- We will carry out extensive work to set up systems, procedures and monitoring arrangements that will help us ensure consistency of approach and a seamless process for those using the system. This will include implementation of a new planning IT system by April 2012, which will be then used for all of the estimated 4000 planning applications per year that lie within the National Park area. In future years we will seek to raise standards, improve consistency and reduce costs in local authority performance where appropriate.
- In 2011/12 we will start work to develop a consistent planning policy framework for the National Park. We aim to adopt a Core Strategy for the National Park by 2014, reflecting strategies and priorities developed through work on the National Park Management Plan. This will include some important strategies such as the approach to minerals and waste and detailed consideration of the needs of market towns within the National Park. There will be a transitional period until we have developed the Core Strategy during which we will rely on the existing local authorities' planning policies. However, we will prepare a Supplementary Planning Document in 2011/12 to strengthen consistency across existing policies. We will also develop an approach to joint working with the local authorities on Joint Core Strategies.
- We will make strenuous efforts to communicate these changes effectively to a wide range of interested parties.

## Objective 4

### **Ensure an effective and efficient organisation that is able to support achievement of National Park Purposes and Duty**

We are committed to efficiency and effectiveness in the management of the SDNPA.

An important focus of our shadow year in 2010/11 was to put in place staffing, systems and support arrangements to enable the organisation to become operational from April 2011 and to have the right capacity to fulfil its Purposes and Duty and meet its objectives.

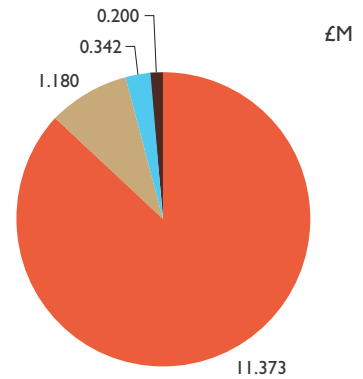
- During 2011/12 we will complete the recruitment of staff to core roles, so that there is a full complement by September 2011. We will retain the flexibility to support the evolving role of the organisation as this becomes clearer through the development of the National Park Management Plan.
- Building on the staff induction work that has taken place in 2010/11, we will take action to develop a consistent culture in the organisation, based on the values that we have already adopted and a culture of high performance.
- We will progress work on the refurbishment of the organisation's new headquarters building in Midhurst to enable occupation in late 2012. We will also review the current provision of area offices to ensure that staff working with local communities are supported in their work by well maintained accommodation and good communication links.
- In accordance with our Guiding Principles, we procure most of the organisation's support services through partnership arrangements with local authorities within the National Park. We will complete reviews of support services to ensure their effectiveness, aiming to use local authority providers where possible.

# Key Information

## Where the SDNPA's income comes from

The main source of income is a grant from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The other significant income is from fees charged for planning applications.

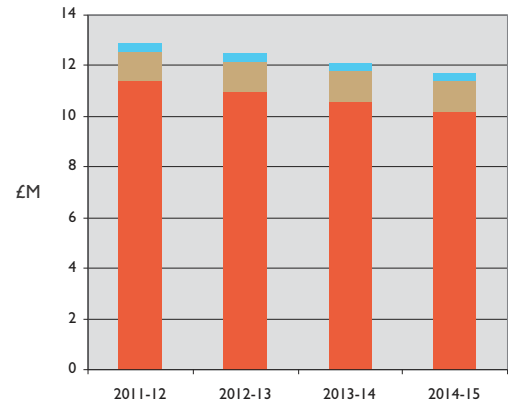
- National Park Grant
- Other income (mainly grants)
- Planning Income
- Reserves



## Funding over 4 years

The income from Defra is expected to reduce over the next four years. The Authority has established a Medium Term Financial Strategy which ensures that its plans take account of this reduction.

- Other income (mainly grants)
- Planning Income
- National Park Grant

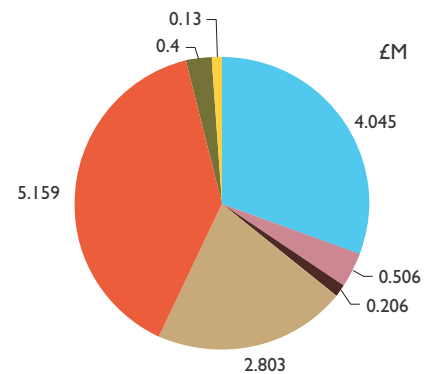


## What the SDNPA will spend

The Authority has made a decision to buy in services in areas such as planning and support services from other local authorities.

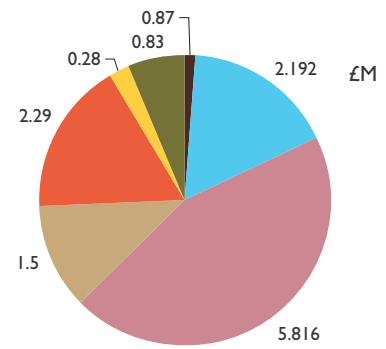
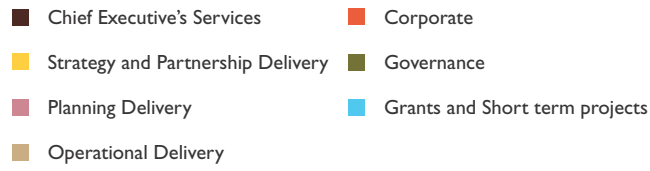
- Employees
- Services bought in
- Premises
- Community Grants
- Transport
- Unallocated
- Materials and Services

The total gross spending is £13.1m.



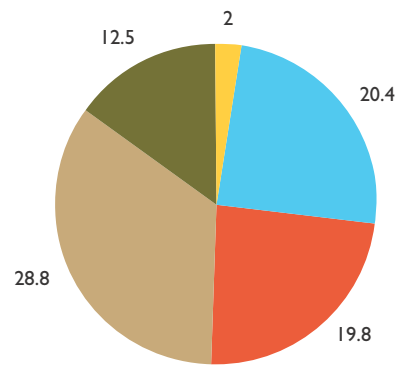
## Spending against the objectives

The main areas of spending relate to planning, operational services and working with partners to develop the Park.



## Staffing information

83.5 Full-time equivalent posts



## **Chief Executive Services**

National Park Officer, support to the Chair of the Authority and senior managers.

## **Strategy & Partnerships Delivery**

Delivery of the priorities for the National Park achieved through work on the National Park Management Plan: engagement of partners and stakeholders; development of a State of the National Park report and of strategies and partnership programmes to achieve priority outcomes; award of grants through the Sustainable Communities Fund and communications with partners and communities. Supported by work to attract additional external funding.

## **Planning Delivery**

Carrying out the role of statutory planning authority for the National Park. Developing a consistent planning policy framework for the area that enables appropriate and high quality development to meet local needs while protecting and enhancing the special qualities of the National Park. Determining the most significant planning applications directly and ensuring the consistent and timely determination of other applications on our behalf by local authorities under agency agreements.

## **Operational Delivery**

Support for community initiatives and high standards of land management that support National Park Purposes and Duty through a locally-based ranger service that can offer practical advice and help with solutions to problems; managing volunteers working in communities and in the countryside; support practical actions to deliver the emerging priorities of the National Park Management Plan, including projects under the Sustainable Communities Fund, partnership programmes and land management activity funded through the Higher Level Stewardship scheme.

## **Corporate and Governance**

Support services (many bought in from outside suppliers), other corporate activities and members services.



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