

South Downs National Park Authority

Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy

Version 3.2

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This document is available in alternative formats and in different languages on request. If you need support or assistance to help you read and/or understand this document, please contact the Authority on 01730 814810

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 We aim to deliver high quality and efficient services. We are always trying to do better, and we welcome feedback. It is important because it helps us to build on strengths and learn from mistakes. If things go wrong, we want to put them right as fairly and as quickly as possible. When things go well, we appreciate compliments and suggestions. Comments and suggestions let us know how we can improve our services. We record complaints, comments, compliments so that we can manage them efficiently and effectively, and monitor them.

Our commitment

1.2 We define a complaint as “*an expression of dissatisfaction about our services or the services of our contractors*”.

1.3 If you want to make a complaint, we will:

- Make it easy for you to contact us
- Deal with your complaint quickly
- Give you a full answer
- Be polite and professional in how we deal with you
- Aim to reply to stage 1 complaints in 10 working days, or tell you if we need longer to deal with your complaint
- Complete stage 2 complaints within 20 working days
- Complete stage 3 complaints within 20 working days
- Keep you informed about progress at all stages
- Apologise if we have made a mistake and do our best to put things right as quickly as possible.

1.4 We also welcome compliments about things we have done right, and comments and suggestions to help us improve our services.

1.5 If you require any assistance in making your complaint or need help to understand this policy, explain your complaint or comment, or understand our response, please contact us or ask someone to speak to us and we will try to help you. This assistance may include (but is not limited to) providing documentation in alternative formats or meeting with you to discuss your complaint directly. If you need assistance to make your complaint, please contact us, using the details set out at section 9, to discuss this so that we can make any reasonable adjustments necessary to support you.

1.6 We will only use the information you provide to us for the purposes of processing your complaint. Your information, including any personal information you provide to us (such as name and contact details) may be shared with officers within the Authority or with other relevant authorities as required, only for the purposes of processing your complaint. A summary of complaints will be published as part of the Authority’s annual reporting process. This report will not contain personal information about complainants. Details of your rights under the Data Protection Act are available on the Authority website [Privacy Statement - South Downs National Park Authority](#)

2. WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

2.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the South Downs National Park Authority’s (SDNPA’s) action or lack of action or about the standard of service. This applies whether the action was, or the service was, provided by the SDNPA itself, a

person, or body acting on behalf of the SDNPA. Dissatisfaction can also be because we have failed to provide a service that we said we would, or that the service we did provide was below our usual standard or that we took too long to do something. It could also be because you believe we treated you unfairly or that the people working for us were unhelpful or rude.

- 2.2 It assists us to deal with complaints efficiently if you contact us as quickly as possible after the incident.. We will not treat something as a complaint if it happened more than 12 months ago.

3 WHAT IS NOT COVERED BY THIS POLICY?

- 3.1 We intend, wherever possible, to allow a complaint to be dealt with under this complaints procedure. There are however some exceptions:

- an appeal against a planning decision or attempt to overturn a decision we have taken
- a complaint where the customer has started legal proceedings or has made an insurance claim against the Authority; or where the Authority has started legal proceedings involving the customer
- a complaint that has already been heard by a court or tribunal
- a complaint that a Member has breached the Member Code of Conduct (see section 8)

- 3.2 The reason why these matters are not dealt with under this complaints procedure is because there are alternative mechanisms to deal with these complaints.

- 3.3 If for any reason we cannot deal with a complaint under this procedure, we will give an explanation with the acknowledgement of the complaint

- 3.4 The SDNPA has put in place arrangements with a number of councils to handle most (but not all) planning applications and other planning matters. We refer to these Councils as Host Authorities. The first step in making complaint concerning the planning function is to find out if the matter is being dealt with by a Host Authority or the SDNPA. If you want to complain about something that is being dealt with by one of the Host Authorities, you should complain directly to them. You can find a list of the Host Authorities who deal with planning at [Who deals with my planning application? - South Downs National Park Authority](#)

- 3.5 The Host Authority will deal with your complaint using its own complaints procedure. Even though your complaint involves the SDNPA, it will still be dealt with by the Host Authority. If your complaint isn't resolved by the Host Authority after stages 1 and 2, the SDNPA will then call in the complaint and the complaint will be dealt with in line with the SDNPA complaint procedure as a SDNPA stage 2 complaint.

- 3.6 If you want to complain about an application the SDNPA is dealing with you should complain directly to the SDNPA i [Our compliments, comments and complaints process - South Downs National Park Authority](#)

4 HOW DO I MAKE A COMPLAINT?

- 4.1 The SDNPA has a three stage complaints procedure. We know how important it is for complaints to be taken seriously and dealt with quickly and fully in an impartial way. The contact information you need is on our website. It is also at the end of this policy

document.

Stage one – informal complaints

- 4.2 You can contact us via telephone, email, letter, in person or by using the form on our website. You can submit the form electronically or print it off and post it to us if you prefer. You can also ask an SDNPA member or someone else to contact us on your behalf.
- 4.3 Many complaints are straightforward and can be dealt with by the team providing the service. We aim to deal with as many complaints as possible at this stage and you can expect us to respond to stage one complaints in 10 working days.
- 4.4 If we can't resolve your complaint, we will let you know what we will do and when you can expect a response. If we do not hear anything from you for 3 months after you make your complaint and the matter is not resolved we will assume you don't want to follow it up and close the complaint.

Stage 2 – formal complaints

- 4.5 We will try to resolve your complaint informally, but if it is not possible the next stage is more formal. We ask that you to make your complaint in writing, preferably using our complaints form. You can download this from our website or ask us to send you one by post.
- 4.6 Completing the form means we have an accurate and complete record of your complaint in your own words and helps to make sure there is no confusion or misunderstanding about your complaint. Please set out your complaint as fully and clearly as possible, including when the incident happened and the name of the person you are complaining about, if you know it.
- 4.7 If you are not able to use the form, or have difficulty making your complaint in writing, please contact us to discuss how we can support you in making your complaint.
- 4.8 Your complaint will be recorded and referred to the Director or a senior officer in the relevant service who will investigate it. If the complaint is about the Director it will be investigated by another Director or senior officer. If your complaint is about the Chief Executive it will be sent to the Monitoring Officer for investigation.
- 4.9 We will acknowledge your complaint in 10 working days and let you know who is dealing with it. We aim to respond to stage 2 complaints within 20 working days. If we aren't able to reply to you in that time we will let you know what we will do and when you can expect a reply.
- 4.10 If your complaint is upheld, you will receive a written apology and an explanation of any redress and any steps to prevent a similar problem recurring.

Stage 3 – Referral to the Chief Executive

- 4.11 If you have gone through the formal stage 2 complaints procedure and you are not satisfied with the results of the investigation, you can ask for your complaint to be reviewed by the Chief Executive. If your complaint is about the Chief Executive it will be referred to the Monitoring Officer or another person authorised by them. We aim to respond to stage 3 complaints in 20 working days.
- 4.12 If your complaint is upheld you will receive a written apology and an explanation of any redress and any steps to prevent a similar problem recurring.
- 4.13 All comments and complaints are treated confidentially and will not disadvantage you in any future dealings with the SDNPA. It may not always be possible to keep your details confidential, such as where your complaint is about a third party or where particular

legislation applies to your complaint.

5 WHAT IF I'M NOT SATISFIED?

- 5.1 We aim to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction. If that doesn't happen, you can refer your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman using the details set out below at section 13
- 5.2 The Ombudsman investigates complaints of maladministration. Maladministration means that we have done something we should not have done, done something the wrong way, or have not done something we should have. The Ombudsman will not investigate your complaint just because you disagree with the decision made by the SDNPA. The Ombudsman recommends that you take your complaint through our internal complaints procedure before referring it to them.
- 5.3 In some cases, relations between you and the SDNPA may deteriorate while your complaint is being investigated. If this happens and there is little chance of getting a satisfactory outcome, there is often little point in completing all stages of the complaints procedure. When this happens the Ombudsman may be prepared to consider your complaint, before the SDNPA's complaints procedure has finished.

6 HOW DO I GIVE COMPLIMENTS AND MAKE COMMENTS ON THE SDNPA'S WORK?

- 6.1 There may be times when you think that we have done a really good job or one of the people who works for us has impressed you. If this happens please let us know. We aim to constantly improve what we do, and examples of things we do well are just as important as understanding how we can do things better after making a mistake.
- 6.2 If you want to pay us a compliment, or make a comment or suggestion about our services or our people, please use the form on our website or write to us or telephone us. Details of how to do this are on our website and at the end of this policy document.

7 HOW DO I ASK FOR AN EXPLANATION RATHER THAN MAKE A COMPLAINT?

- 7.1 If you want us to explain why we have or have not done something, please contact us and ask. Details of how to do this are on our website and at the end of this policy document.

8 HOW DO I COMPLAIN ABOUT A MEMBER'S CONDUCT

- 8.1 If you want to make a complaint that one of the Members of the SDNPA has failed to comply with the SDNPA Members' code of conduct, you must make your complaint in writing to the Authority's Monitoring Officer.
- 8.2 The Authority can only deal with complaints about the behaviour of a Member. It will not deal with complaints about things that are not covered by the Members Code of Conduct. If you want to make a complaint you must say why you think the Member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct for the South Downs National Park Authority. You can find a copy of the Code of Conduct on our website. [Code of Conduct - South Downs National Park Authority](#)

9 HOW TO CONTACT US

- 9.1 If you want to make a complaint, comment, or pay us a compliment, you can call us on 01730 814810 and ask to be put through to the relevant service or write to us at:
Compliments, Comments and Complaints

South Downs National Park Authority
South Downs Centre
North Street
Midhurst
West Sussex
GU29 9DH

- 9.2 You can email us at **info@southdowns.gov.uk**
- 9.3 You can download the complaints form from our website and email, it or print it off and post it to us, or fill it in online at **www.southdowns.gov.uk**
- 9.4 If you want to complain about the behaviour of a Member you should download the form to use for complaints about Members from our website **www.southdowns.gov.uk** and send your complaint in writing to:

The Monitoring Officer to South Downs National Park Authority
Legal Services
Hampshire County Council
The Castle
Winchester
SO30 8UJ

10 VEXATIOUS BEHAVIOUR

- 10.1 We aim to deal fairly, honestly and properly with all feedback we receive. We will not tolerate threatening or abusive behaviour towards people who work for us. If you contact us, including via social media, to make a complaint, or to provide other feedback but behave in a way that is threatening, offensive or abusive to the people who work for us, either when you provide the feedback or when we are looking into it for you, we may choose to treat you as vexatious.
- 10.2 We understand that if you take the time to give us feedback or make a complaint, you are concerned about the issue you are raising with us. However if you unreasonably persist in raising the same issue over and over again, even though we have investigated your issue and come to a conclusion, we may choose to treat you as vexatious.
- 10.3 Similarly, if you make it difficult for us to investigate your complaint by contacting us very frequently or, if you persistently contact lots of people working for us about your complaint, we may choose to treat you as vexatious.
- 10.4 If we decide to do this we will tell you what we will do and how we will communicate with you. We may ask you to contact a particular person; ask you to only contact us in writing; or we may refuse to respond to repeated communications about the same matter.

11 EQUALITY

- 11.1 The Authority will handle all complaints fairly and honestly regardless of who makes a complaint. The Authority treats all members of the public equitably and will not show bias to any particular individual or group on the basis of age, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender or gender identity.

12 ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

- 12.1 We will only investigate complaints made anonymously where the complaint includes allegations of a particularly serious or significant nature or where for other reasons the public interest would be best served by investigating the complaint. The decision regarding whether an anonymous complaint will be investigated will be made by the Authority's Monitoring Officer.

13 OTHER ADDRESSES YOU MAY FIND USEFUL

13.1 The Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4771

Coventry

CV4 0EH

Tel: 0300 061 0614

Fax: 024 7682 0001

Website: www.lgo.org.uk