

Estates Strategy Update September 2012



I Introduction

- I.1 The requirement of the estates strategy is to ensure that fully functional properties and facilities to support the SDNPA business needs are available.
- I.2 Sourcing of properties (and land if necessary) can be completed through outright purchase or leasing arrangements. Any purchasing or leasing arrangements will have legal and financial implications for the organisation. For leased properties there will be exit funding required when the leases are surrendered.
- I.3 Work on the estates strategy as a distinct piece of work began with the recruitment of the Estates and Administration Manager in February 2012. It was assumed that we could look at the current facilities and generate a plan to meet the future needs of the organisation. However, it has been found that on several sites used by the SDNPA that no formal agreements or permissions are in place to protect our current operations. This will be explained in detail under the headings for each site and is hence why a full estate strategy is not yet prepared.
- I.4 As part of the original research work for this report some information was readily available with respect to each building. However work has been delayed as there were no clear asset records for any of the offices occupied by the SDNPA.
- I.5 Surveys of each building have been carried out to generate asset records for each building. The Operations team have asset lists for equipment used by their staff and a stock take will be completed by the end of August 2012 to check the accuracy of the list.
- I.6 This report will concentrate on identifying items that need to be resolved in the short term and will identify areas that are subject to further high level discussions.
- I.7 I would like to thank Kate Turner for all her help and assistance in carrying out survey work, and to thank Chris Manning and Ian Hartle for generating the maps.

2 Current Estate

- 2.1 The following buildings are part of SDNPA estate:

Location	Office	Use	Type of ownership	Term of lease
Midhurst	Hatton House	HQ – SMT and Strategy & Partnerships staff	Leased	To 30/06/2013
	Peachy House	Meeting rooms & Member Services	Leased	To 30/06/2013
	Rosemary's Parlour	Planning staff	Leased	To 09/09/2013
	M2	Corporate Services staff	Leased	Tenancy at will
	Depot	Area Office	Leased	To 31/03/2014
Petersfield	Penns Place	Planning staff	Leased	To 31/03/2013
	Queen Elizabeth Country Park	Area Office	Leased	To 31/12/2013
Singleton	Weald & Downland museum	Area Office	Leased	To 31/03/2015
Brighton	Stanmer Park	Area Office	Leased	Tenancy at will
	Seven Sisters	Tool Barn	Leased	To 06/07/2015

3 Central Midhurst and Penns Place

- 3.1 All of the properties in central Midhurst and the offices in Penns Places in Petersfield are held under short term temporary leases.
- 3.2 These buildings support members of staff who will relocate to the South Downs Centre when the purchase and refurbishment has been completed. These short term leases will be surrendered once relocation and any remedial works that the SDNPA are obliged to carry out under the terms of the lease have been completed. The leases for all of these properties are being renewed to facilitate the change in completion date for the Capron House refurbishment.
- 3.3 All that is required for these premises in the period until relocation is to carry out minor works and maintenance and to ensure budgeting is in place and leases are renewed to coincide with the opening and relocation to the South Downs Centre.

4 Stedham Sawmill Containers

- 4.1 SDNPA had leases on three storage containers on the Stedham Sawmill site. The containers were used for archive storage of large amounts of SDJC planning files, furniture and ICT equipment.
- 4.2 All of these containers have now been emptied and the leases surrendered. When the final accounts have been paid (August/September) these will be removed from the asset register.

5 Area Offices

- 5.1 All of the area offices currently in use are sites that were used by the SDJC and subsequently transferred to the SDNPA. They are held under short term temporary leases and include:
 - Central West - Midhurst Depot
 - Central East - Singleton Depot (Weald and Downland Museum site)
 - Western - Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Petersfield
 - Eastern - Stanmer Park, Brighton and Seven Sisters Barn
- 5.2 Lease issues have been identified at each of these sites and these will be covered in the following sections.

6 Midhurst Depot

- 6.1 The current situation that has been reviewed consisted of:
 - A lease has been in place that covered the use of one office and one printer room.
 - We are, in fact, using a second office, a meeting room and two store rooms.
 - It was found that we had allowed the Sussex Wildlife Trust to use a desk and set up an office within our office without the permission of the landlord.
 - It was also found that we were using a significant amount of non-leased outside space for storage of trailers, equipment and logs.
- 6.2 Actions have been taken to reduce the amount of outside space in use and a new lease has been agreed to formalise all of our existing use.
- 6.3 The following issues need to be noted with respect to this Area Office:

- 6.3.1 It is situated on land that is owned by West Sussex County Council. The land is surplus to requirements by the Council and they are actively trying to sell the land. We will be required to vacate the premises with 3 months notice period if they find a buyer.
- 6.3.2 The building has suffered from a lack of investment in maintenance over a number of years. There are self-seeded shrubs growing on the flat roof, fascias are rotting, guttering is broken, internal decoration is poor, flooring in the offices exceptionally poor etc. The light fittings are exceptionally old giving poor performance in terms of lighting and energy efficiency and the flat roof building as a whole is very energy inefficient. If an energy performance audit were commissioned we anticipate it would achieve a score in the poor performance range.
- 6.3.3 The building is tucked away within a council depot and has no visible presence to the public. The area surrounding the building has suffered from a lack of investment and gives the impression of a site heading toward dereliction.
- 6.3.4 Within the same site is a separate building used for storage and workshop facilities. The Communications team store event equipment and publications in this workshop. The workshop is shared by the Volunteer Rangers and our own Ranger staff. In terms of size, capacity and potential this is the best workshop facility we have in the portfolio. If better housekeeping rules were applied this facility could be substantially improved.
- 6.3.5 The Council are required to give us at least 3 months notice to cease the lease. We need to be prepared to answer the following questions should we receive such a notice:
- Where will SDNPA staff relocate to (including vehicles, trailers and all externally stored equipment)?
 - Where will the volunteer ranger staff relocate to (including workshop facilities)?
 - Where will the Sussex Wildlife team member relocate to?
 - Where will the Communications team relocate the events equipment and publications materials to?
 - The meeting room and land surrounding the building has been extremely useful for hosting fire extinguisher training for all staff. We need to find a suitable alternative for this training as there will be an ongoing (annual) need for the training of staff.
 - Where will the furniture stock relocate to? This should only be a problem if the notice to quit arrives before the Capron House project is completed.
 - Where will the ICT equipment relocate to?

- 6.4 In conclusion, in terms of working space this facility offers one of the better solutions for staff, however a significant amount of money would need to be spent to update a rather tired facility and improve the sustainability credentials of the building.
- 6.5 This office is set on a site that has severe limitations with respect to playing any sort of role within the customer facing/interpretation arena.
- 6.6 West Sussex County Council is under extreme pressure to find the right purchaser for this site. It is clear that the SDNPA should be making arrangements now to vacate this site as soon as possible in a controlled manner.

7 Singleton Office (Weald and Downland Museum Site)

- 7.1 The current situation that has been reviewed consisted of:

- There are not legal agreements in place to protect our continued use of the offices, workshop and parking facilities on this site.
- The site offers office accommodation, messing facilities, dedicated parking facilities for SDNPA vehicles and a workshop facility.
- Staff members on site have use of a meeting room free of charge, that is also available to the rest of the SDNPA if required (chargeable).

7.2 A draft lease has now been agreed with the director of the museum to take us through to 31 March 2015. The draft lease is with our solicitors for comment.

7.3 The following issues need to be noted with respect to this Area Office:

7.3.1 The building that the offices are based in suffers from extremes of temperature in the summer and winter. If the building were subjected to an energy efficiency audit we would expect it would yield an extremely poor efficiency score. Due to the nature of the building it is unlikely that the museum would be keen on us investing any money to improve the efficiency rating.

7.3.2 The lighting regime is very poor within the building giving an extremely patchy and uneven spread of light. It is possible that we could get permission to install a more energy efficient system that could improve on this.

7.3.3 High value pieces of plant and equipment are kept within the office area due to the vulnerability of the workshop. Many of these items are petrol driven, increasing the fire risk potential to the offices. We will need to explore with the museum the potential for some form of secure storage away from the office. It would be extremely damaging to the reputation of the SDNPA if this museum building and adjacent buildings were damaged due to any fire that may be attributed to these items.

7.3.4 The workshop facility on site, whilst being extremely well kept and managed, is structurally and environmentally very poor.

7.3.5 We have secured five reserved parking spaces for the SDNPA vehicles; however they are not in a secured compound making them vulnerable.

7.4 In conclusion, this office is extremely well placed in an open air museum environment offering excellent opportunities for the development of customer facing and interpretation initiatives on site and offers an excellent gateway to the Downs.

7.5 The offices fall well below that required for decent, sustainable working environments. The vehicles and workshop are some distance from the office and are not visible from the office.

7.6 Enquiries should be made to examine the possibility for establishing Ranger facilities on site that would improve the quality and sustainability of any facility used by the SDNPA.

8 Queen Elizabeth Country Park (QECF)

8.1 The current situation that has been reviewed consisted of:

- SDNPA have use of office space in a Hampshire County Council office building.
- This building also accommodates the QECF shop, lecture theatre, council rangers and the council rights of ways staff.
- The offices are on a first floor of a two storey building.

- The offices suffer from extremes of heat and cold during summer and winter. The building is of a type and age that is exceptionally energy efficient. The council have off-set this by installing a biomass boiler using woodchip sourced locally and stored in a barn on site.
- On the site there is a compound that the SDNPA have sole use of where a container and the SDNPA vehicles are kept. The container has an electrical supply attached, has internal lighting and power and is used as a combined workshop and store.

8.2 The following issues need to be noted with respect to this Area Office:

- 8.2.1 The main building on site is leased to Hampshire County Council by the Forestry Commission. There is no legal permission in place to cover the use of the offices by the SDNPA. We are in negotiation with the HCC Land Agent to rectify this situation. HCC will have to formally obtain permission from the landlord (the Forestry Commission) to sublet the offices to us. We have already spoken to the Forestry Commission Land Agent and he has agreed to our use of the space and will support the request from the council. During these negotiations we discovered that the council lease for the land and property expires on the 31 December 2013, so this is the longest period over which we will be able to obtain a lease.
- 8.2.2 There are no legal permissions in place to cover our use of the land for the Rangers compound. The land belongs to the Forestry Commission. We are currently in negotiations with the Forestry Commission Land Agent to secure a lease for this land. The land is on part of a site that is under discussion with senior managers from HCC and the Forestry Commission. The discussions relate to the development of QECP post the expiry of the lease on 31 December 2013. The Forestry Commission will only grant a lease to this date so that it will not prejudice any future development plans for the whole of QECP.
- 8.2.3 SDNPA does not have planning permission to use this land as a depot. We are currently working to rectify this as soon as possible. It had been agreed that we will submit a two year temporary planning application to cover our use of this land. We anticipate that within this timescale the long term detailed development plan for QECP will be issued.
- 8.2.4 The container on the site is used as a workshop and a store. It is too small to fulfil both of these roles and is a cause of concern for the Area Manager and a cause of frustration for the volunteer rangers. It is proposed to install a second container on site that will become a dedicated store and the original unit will stay as a workshop. Planning colleagues have agreed that this should be contained within the same temporary planning application.

8.3 In conclusion, QECP offers excellent opportunities for public facing/interpretation initiatives. There are very strong operational links on site between the SDNPA, HCC Rangers, Forestry Commission Rangers, HCC Rights of Way Officers and the Butterfly Conservation Team.

8.4 The offices fall well below the requirements for decent, sustainable working environments.

8.5 The limitation with respect to the provision of a long term lease gives cause for concern.

9 Stanmer Park and Seven Sisters Barn

9.1 The current situation that has been reviewed consisted of:

- The SDNPA has use of office space for the Operations team, meeting rooms, store rooms, shared use of a workshop and a remote timber storage unit.
- Parking for SDNPA vehicles is on site directly outside of the portakabin.
- The timber storage unit houses Ranger equipment and Communications team events equipment.

- The offices are based in part of an old portakabin type building that is surplus to Brighton & Hove City Council's requirements.
- The building has passed its useful life and is deteriorating. Last year the SDNPA had to spend money to repair leaks on the roof.
- The SDNPA Operations team also support the volunteer rangers based at a workshop in the Seven Sisters Country Park.
- The storage unit at Seven Sisters Country Park is exceptionally well maintained and there is space on site for two SDNPA vehicles.

9.2 The following issues need to be noted with respect to this Area Office:

- 9.2.1 There are no legal agreements in place to cover our use of these facilities. We are in negotiations with BHCC and expect a draft lease to be forthcoming shortly. The Council do not charge us any rent for these facilities however we do have to contribute to the overall cost of running the building by way of a service charge.
- 9.2.2 The building suffers from extremes of temperature and we would anticipate that if it were subject to an energy performance audit it would achieve a rating in the highly inefficient range.
- 9.2.3 Some staff cycle to work, yet there are no cycle storage facilities available to them. They bring their cycles into the building and keep them in the store room. This makes accessing the supplies on the shelving difficult.
- 9.2.4 There is an element of uncertainty as to how long we may remain in these buildings. BHCC are due to deliver a Stanmer Park development paper. It is likely that as part of this development plan the portakabin will be identified for demolition.

9.3 In conclusion, the office is tucked away in a remote part of the park and does not lend itself to playing a significant role in any customer facing/interpretation initiative. The site itself however does have a tremendous potential.

9.4 The offices do offer relatively spacious accommodation and with some minor improvements will offer adequate working space in the short term.

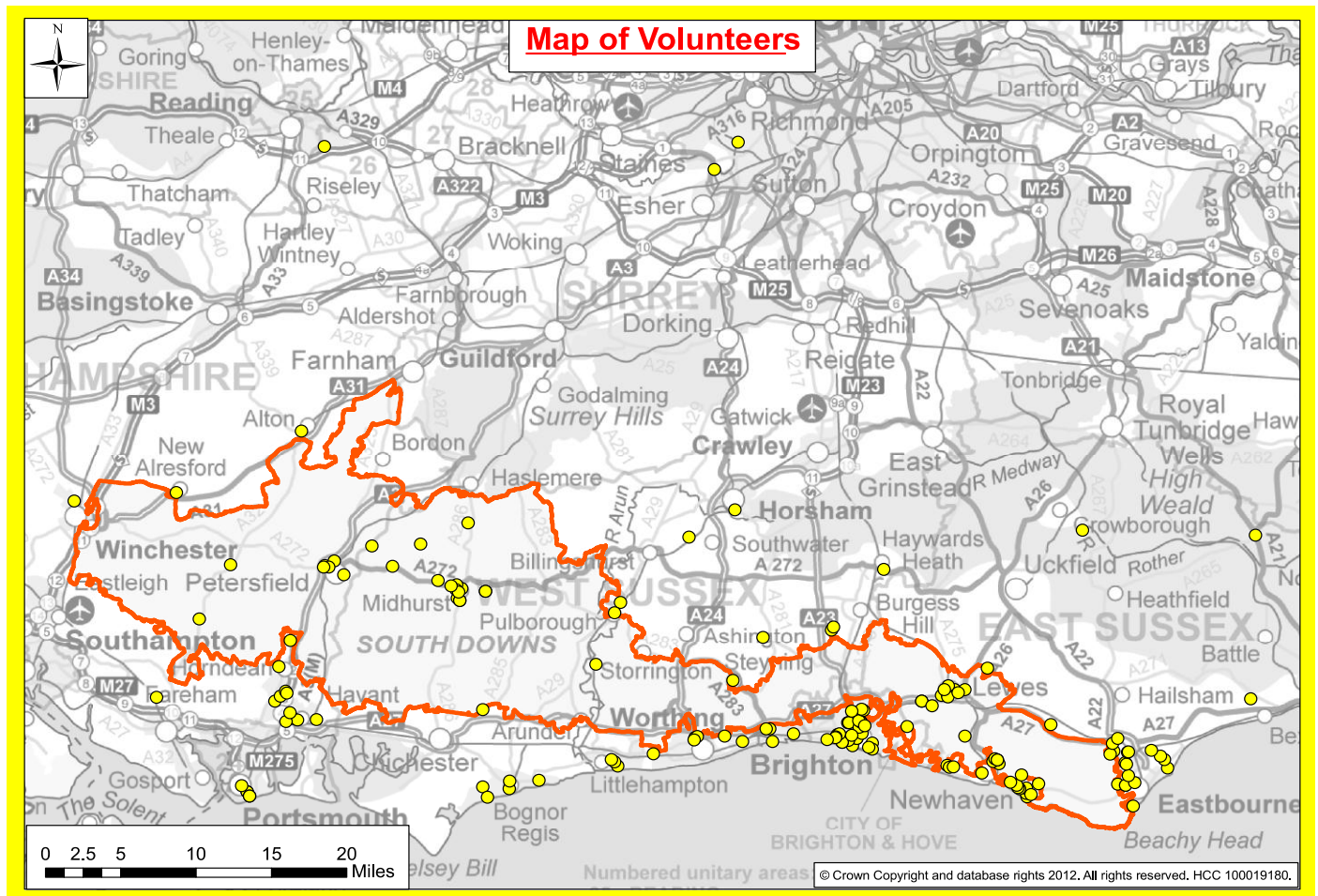
10 Vehicles

- 10.1 There are significant numbers of staff based at Stanmer Park and Midhurst. Many are required to carry out visits/meetings away from the office during the working day. One of the biggest obstacles to staff car sharing to work is the restriction of being carless during the day.
- 10.2 As part of the estates strategy and linked to business need and office location, we are investigating options to the sourcing of pool vehicles.
- 10.3 A travel survey is being planned as well as a usage study of current SDNPA vehicles.
- 10.4 In terms of sourcing options, we are exploring the concept of electrically powered or hybrid vehicles and are looking at the relevant merits and value for money of procurement methods e.g. purchasing or leasing.

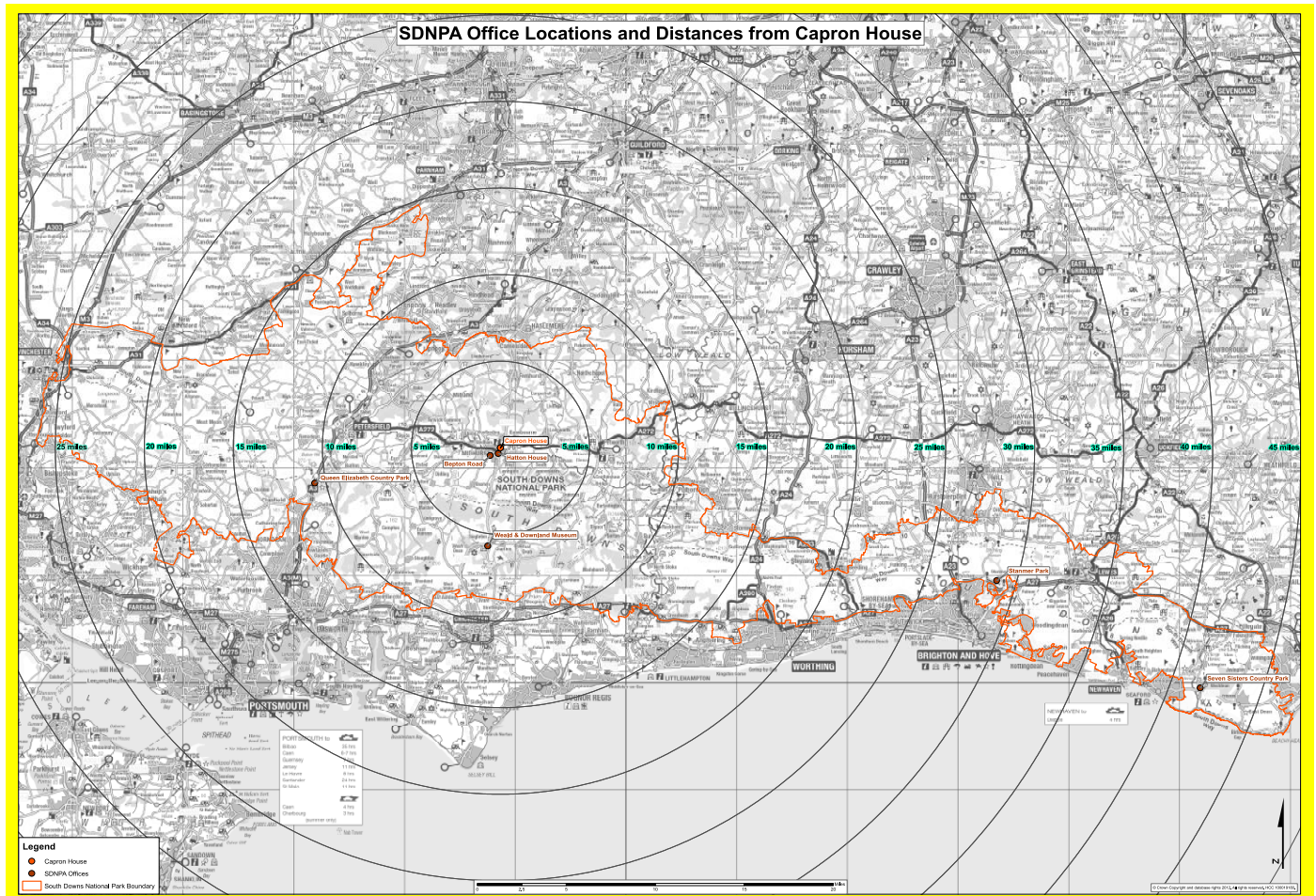
11 Supporting information

- 11.1 When considering an Estates Strategy it is important to understand where it is we need to work to fulfil our duties. Several maps have been commissioned to help with this.

- 11.2 The first map below illustrates the locations in which our volunteer rangers live. This map will be updated to have the dots coloured to indicate which Area Workshop the volunteer ranger is primarily linked to.



- 11.3 The second map that has been commissioned is to indicate relative distances from Midhurst of various offices. Each circle represents 5 miles.



- 11.4 We are working with colleagues to investigate the possibility of generating a map that will illustrate where the rangers have completed pieces of work in the past and where future pieces of work are scheduled.
- 11.5 All of this information should help the SDNPA determine if we have the correct resources in the correct locations.

12 Recommendations

- 12.1 **Midhurst Depot:** The SDNPA will have to leave this site at some point in the future. We have been informed that the majority of the volunteer rangers who support the Central West Area also support the Central East Area. It is also important to note the close proximity of these two area facilities. It is therefore recommended that investigations should take place to source a single site to support these two area offices.

- 12.2 QECF: The existing area offices at Midhurst, Singleton and QECF are all within an 11 mile radius of Midhurst. The QECF area office is on the eastern edge of the Western Area. It is recommended that SDNPA work with HCC and the Forestry Commission on the future plans for the site to ensure suitable provision is available for the SDNPA Western Area office. Additionally, and alongside this work, we may also wish to investigate if there are any other suitable premises in alternative parts of the Western Area that could support a Western Office.
- 12.3 Stanmer Park: The building at Stanmer Park has a very limited life span and in terms of energy efficiency, sustainability and environmentally acceptable working conditions is less than ideal. It is recommended that we work with BHCC to assist in the production of a development plan for the park. This will allow us to establish our strategy for staying on site.