

Report to	Resources & Performance Committee
Date	17 September 2013
By	Director of Strategy & Partnerships
Title of Report	Review of Major Projects Panel and the Star Chamber
Purpose of Report	To describe the deployment over the last five months of the grant funding by the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) via the Major Projects Fund.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:
1) note the investment of the Major Project Fund.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides a review of the scale of impact achieved via the Major Projects Fund (MPF) and the Star Chamber over the five months from April 2013 to August 2013.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Major Projects Fund is a rolling fund established to support substantive partnership projects. The approved budget for the fund for the years 2011/12-2013/14 is £1 million. The Major Partnership Panel renamed to the Major Projects Panel (MPP) was formed in 2011 to provide significant scrutiny for all large projects, not just those involving partnerships.
- 2.2 It is not a formally constituted committee but has an advisory and oversight function, providing an independent assessment to the Director of Strategy and Partnerships for grants requested that exceed £50,000. It comprises the Chair and Deputy Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), together with the Chairs of Resources & Performance, Planning, and Standards & Audit Committees and the Chair of the Sustainable Communities Fund Panel, with support from Directors (**Appendix 1**).
- 2.3 The SDNPA through the MPF has committed £1.189 million funding on 16 new major projects across the South Downs National Park running over the next four years (**Appendix 2**). For every £1 invested by the SDNPA, MPF projects attracted matched funding of over £6.
- 2.4 The **Star Chamber** (SC) was created on the 5 November 2012. This creates a middle tier of decision making to remove the burden of smaller projects from MPP and to increase the level of scrutiny for smaller and in-house projects. It takes the form of a committee (**Appendix 3**), chaired by the Chief Executive with at least two Directors, the Finance and Procurement Manager and the External Funding Manager (**Appendix 4**). It considers proposals for revenue or capital projects below £50,000 expenditure on any internal budget, not just the MPF budget.
- 2.5 The Major Projects Panel supported the proposal on 20 November 2012 and Resources and Performance Committee approved it on 13 February 2013.
- 2.6 In 2012/13 there was only one Star Chamber meeting before the end of the financial year. Two projects were assessed, the Rother Valley Forest Schools Project (approved) and the Green Deal proposal that was referred back for further development.
- 3. The Major Projects Fund from April to August 2013**
- 3.1 So far this financial year, SDNPA has committed £196,000 of the MPF budget (£150k

through the Major Projects Panel and £46k by the Star Chamber) to major projects across the South Downs National Park (SDNP). In total, including projects not funded by the MPF (3.4), seven projects have been approved to run over the next three years.

- 3.2 The Major Projects Panel agreed to support the: **Wooded Heaths** project with £150,000 from the MPF budget subject to the £1.6m HLF bid being successful.
- 3.3 The Star Chamber agreed to support the following projects from MPF funding:
 - **LEADER Transition 2014** project with £10,000 with a total project cost of £130,000;
 - **ARC Field Trip** project with £10,000 in 14/15 and £10,000 in 15/16 from the MPF budget. The total project costs £50,000;
 - **FieldFare LEADER project transition** project with £10,000 with a total project cost £130,000;
 - **Milland Community Shop** project with £6,000.
- 3.4 The Star Chamber also agreed the commencement of the following projects within other existing SDNPA budgets:
 - **Engaging with River Restoration** project with £19,913 over 3 years from the evidence and performance budget. Total budget over 3 years £33,200;
 - **The South Downs Wooded Heaths** project with £11,500 from the Partnership Delivery budget to enable the development stage for the bid to HLF.
- 4. Audit and future developments**
 - 4.1 The Grant Management Database will eventually be used to record project initiation and decision information, and the Aspireview database will record project management and both will enable reports to be generated from their systems. A project pipeline is maintained and reviewed at every meeting.
 - 4.2 Until the Grant Management Database is operational the audit trail is through the project pipeline, score sheets and meeting minutes.
 - 4.3 The Project Officer to the Chief Executive will work with the External Funding Manager to ensure the audit trail can be migrated to the Grant Management Database once it becomes operational.
- 5. Outcomes and measurement**
 - 5.1 The monitoring and evaluation of major projects will be managed through the Aspireview performance management system.
 - 5.2 For each major project the lead project officer reports annually to the Major Project Panel, SMT or Star Chamber and this information will be input onto the Aspireview system. The system will be used to report performance to the Resources and Performance Committee from October 2013 onwards.
- 6. Resources**
 - 6.1 The total budget for the MPF over the three year period 2011/12 to 2013/14 is £1 million of which £0.739 million is committed to schemes during that period with a further £0.449 million committed for those schemes against future years MPF budgets. Therefore, for 2013/14 £0.261 million is available for allocation to new schemes.
 - 6.2 The MPF operates a ring fenced fund, whereby any unallocated balances and under-spend is rolled forward for this fund into the following financial year.
- 7. Risk management**
 - 7.1 Regular monitoring and reporting of the MPF budgets ensures that grants allocations are made within existing financial resources.
 - 7.2 The rigor of this approach seeks to minimise the risk that an audit would find project approval processes unsound. It also supports actions in the improvement plan.

8. Human Rights, Equalities, Health and Safety

- 8.1 The MPF promotes accessibility; valuing cultural diversity; participation; equality of opportunity; inclusive communities; reducing disadvantage and exclusion.

9. Sustainability

- 9.1 The MPF grants are awarded only if they contribute to the core values and guiding principles of the Authority.
- 9.2 The implementation of this approach will lead to a standardised method for approving projects. It will be easier to ensure that all projects give head to equalities; sustainability; engagement and supporting partnership working.
- 9.3 The MPF is a tool which the SDNPA will use to achieve the National Park Management Plan objective and it supports Objective 3 of the Corporate Plan.

10. External Consultees

- 10.1 None.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Major Partnership Projects Process Flowchart

Appendix 2 Major Partnerships Projects Summary

Appendix 3 Star Chamber Project Process Flowchart

Appendix 4 Star Chamber Terms of Reference

SDNPA Consultees

Chief Executive Officer, Director of Corporate Services, Director of Planning, Director of Strategy and Partnerships, Director of Operations, Chief Finance Officer, Deputy Chief Finance Officer, Monitoring Officer & Legal Services.