



## **SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

### **RECRUITMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT PERSON**

#### **INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS**

##### Background Information

##### South Downs National Authority

There are 15 National Parks in the UK. Known as Britain's Breathing Spaces, National Parks are areas of spectacular landscape that include mountains, meadows, moorlands, woods, coasts and wetlands. Mostly farmed landscapes supporting living, working communities, National Parks are areas of protected countryside that everyone can visit and enjoy.

The South Downs National Park uniquely combines a biodiverse landscape with bustling towns and villages, covers an area of over 1,600 km<sup>2</sup> and is home to more than 110,400 people.

The South Downs National Park Authority is the organisation responsible for promoting the purposes of the National Park and the interests of the people who live and work within it.

As a National Park, the SDNPA has statutory purposes and socio-economic responsibilities as specified in the Environment Act of 1995.

1. To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.
2. To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Park by the public.

Working in partnership with other local authorities and other organisations, it is also the duty of the Authority to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of the local communities within the National Park.

##### The Localism Act 2011

Under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 the way that an Authority deals with complaints about the conduct of its elected Members has changed.

The Act requires the Authority, to adopt a code dealing with the conduct expected of Members and Co-opted Members of the Authority, to be consistent with the Seven Principles of Public Life enunciated by the Nolan Committee i.e. selflessness, integrity, objectivity, openness, accountability, honesty and leadership.

In addition, the Act requires the Authority to put in place a system to deal with any allegations regarding Members breaching the code including arrangements for investigating allegations and for making decisions regarding the allegations.

The Authority must also appoint an 'Independent Person' whose view must be sought before the Authority can reach a decision on an allegation it is investigating.

The Authority recognises the importance of high ethical standards in building and maintaining public confidence in its work. At its meeting on 19 June 2012, the Authority adopted a new Code of Conduct for Members and Co-opted Members effective from 1 July 2012.

On 13 September 2012, the Standards and Audit Committee agreed the arrangements for handling allegations of failure to comply with the new Members' Code of Conduct, and recommended their approval and adoption to the Authority. Members also agreed that a Selection Panel comprising the Chair and three other Members of the Standards and Audit Committee be set up to short-list and interview applicants for the role of 'Independent Person', and to make recommendations to the Authority for appointment.

### Independent Person

#### Selection Criteria - Skills and Competencies

I. The Independent Person will have:

- a. a keen interest in standards in public life,
- b. a wish to serve the local community and uphold local democracy,
- c. high standards of personal integrity,
- d. the ability to be objective, independent and impartial,
- e. sound decision making skills,
- f. questioning skills; and
- g. leadership qualities, particularly in respect of exercising sound judgement.

The Independent Person will:

- a. be a person in whose impartiality and integrity the public can have confidence,
- b. understand and comply with confidentiality requirements,
- c. have a demonstrable interest in local issues,
- d. have an awareness of the importance of ethical behaviours; and
- e. be a good communicator.

Desirable additional knowledge and experience:

- a. working knowledge/experience of local government or other public service and/or of large complex organisations and awareness of and sensitivity to the political process; and
- b. knowledge, experience and understanding of judicial/quasi judicial or complaints processes.

You should demonstrate in your application how you meet the above criteria as this will assist the short-listing process.

Means of assessment will be by application form and by interview.

#### Eligibility for Appointment

2. A person cannot be appointed as an Independent Person if they are or, in respect of (a) below, if they were at any time during a period of 5 years prior to the appointment:
  - a. a Member, Co-opted Member or officer of the Authority; or
  - b. a relative<sup>1</sup> or close friend of a person within category (a) above.

However, by virtue of transitional arrangements this does not prevent persons who, in the last five years, were Members or Co-opted Members of the Authority's Standards Committee from being eligible to apply for this role, provided they were not Members or Co-opted Members of that Committee on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2012.

#### Term of Appointment

3. The appointment will be for a period of four years, except where the applicant was in the last five years a Member or Co-opted Member of the Authority's Standards Committee in which case the appointment will end on 30 June 2013. The appointment may be terminated earlier where it is deemed, in the absolute discretion of the Authority, that the role holder has conducted himself/herself in a way which, if he/she was a Member/Co-opted Member of the Authority, would be a breach of the code of conduct.

#### Requirements of the Role

4. Requirements of the role include:
  - a. To assist the Authority in promoting high standards of conduct by Members and Co-opted Members of the Authority and in particular to uphold the Code of Conduct adopted by the Authority.
  - b. To be consulted by the Authority through the Monitoring Officer, the Standards and Audit Committee and/or the Standards Hearings Sub-Committee before it makes a decision on an allegation that it has decided to investigate, and to be available to attend meetings for this purpose.
  - c. To be consulted by the Authority in respect of a standards complaint at any other stage.
  - d. To be consulted by a Member or Co-opted Member of the Authority about whom a complaint has been made.
  - e. In any individual case where consulted, to advise the Authority of any pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest that the Independent Person has in the matter.

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<sup>1</sup> a person ("R") is a relative of another person if R is: (a) the other person's spouse or civil partner, (b) living with the other person as husband and wife or as if they were civil partners, (c) a grandparent of the other person, (d) a lineal descendant of a grandparent of the other person, (e) a parent, sibling or child of a person within paragraph (a) or (b), (f) the spouse or civil partner of a person within paragraph (c), (d) or (e), or (g) living with a person within paragraph (c), (d) or (e) as husband and wife or as if they were civil partners.

- f. To act as advocate and ambassador for the Authority in promoting ethical behaviour.
- g. To attend training events organised and promoted by the Authority.
- h. To attend Standards and Audit Committee on at least an annual basis to give a presentation on ethical standards.

#### Expenses

- 5. The Independent Person is eligible to receive a payment of £ per annum, subject to confirmation by the Authority which will include travelling and subsistence expenses.

#### Induction and Training

- 6. Suitable induction and training will be provided on the role of the Authority's Standards and Audit Committee, the Code of Conduct and the standards framework under the Localism Act 2011.

#### Recruitment Procedure

- 7. Applications shall be submitted in accordance with the instructions in the application form, to be received no later than the 2012. Please note that, in completing the application form, candidates should give evidence of the experience they have of applying the skills and competencies set out in section 1 above.
- 8. A short-listing process will be undertaken, and applicants invited for interview will be notified in writing by the 2012.
- 9. Short-listed candidates will be interviewed by a Selection Panel of Members of the Standards and Audit Committee, during 2012. The Selection Panel will then select a candidate to be recommended to the Authority for appointment. Appointments will be made by the Authority at its meeting on 11 December 2012.
- 10. All candidates interviewed will be notified as soon as possible after interview as to whether or not they are being recommended for appointment.

#### Further information

- 11. It is hoped that the information set out in this note answers most of the questions that potential applicants may have about the role. For further information, you may find the following website of interest:

South Downs National Park Authority – [www.southdowns.gov.uk](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk)

- 12. Potential applicants may also contact the Authority's Monitoring Officer, Kevin Gardner ([kevin.gardner@hants.gov.uk](mailto:kevin.gardner@hants.gov.uk); tel 01962 847381), for an informal discussion about the role.

Dated: 2012