

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Review of the Set-up of the South Downs National Park Authority</b>
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## Introduction and Management Summary

The purpose of this review was to deliver the requirement of the Standards and Audit Committee to undertake an assessment “of any lessons that can be learnt from the establishment of the SDNPA including its HQ accommodation Strategy”.

The review has been progressed against an approved terms of reference (as per Appendix 1). The process has included the interview of 10 members and 8 officers as well as referring to a wide range of documentation including the reports and minutes from Authority Meetings and Committees. We have also been informed by our own work on the National Park Authority’s systems over the last 3 years including significant work on procurement and a review of the governance framework in 2010.

The following management summary reports key issues on an exception basis only. More details of assurances and recommendations for improvement made are in the detailed report (from page 5).

### A description of the context within which the set-up took place.

- Budget uncertainty during the Authority’s shadow year impacted on the timing of some decisions about the staffing of the Authority and procuring other resources. (Rec. 1)
- We note that although the specific expectations of Defra were understood by members we can not readily identify whether or where some of these were documented. Greater transparency of these expectations may have boosted some member’s confidence in the early stages of the set-up process. (Rec. 2)
- There is agreement amongst members that the Guiding Principles have given the NPA focus whilst a Management Plan is compiled. Nevertheless it is important that there is ongoing refinement of priorities. The completion of the new Corporate Plan is an opportunity to do this. (Rec. 3)
- Feedback indicates that there is scope to improve the Authority’s overall communication arrangements. (Rec. 4)

### An examination of the publicly announced timetable leading to full operation on 1 April 2011.

- The timetabling and delivery of key tasks was judged to be effective however feedback from officers indicates that there could have been greater use of formal project planning in some areas. (Rec. 5) There have been acknowledged problems with bringing in effective IT systems and procurement arrangements. (Rec. 6)

An examination of the basis of the transfer of the South Downs Joint Committee on 1 April 2011

- There are still lingering expectations with regard to the enhancement of the NPAs role on rights of way.

An assessment of the first year of operation from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 including consideration of the balance of temporary versus contract staff in providing services.

- The strategy of adopting an interim/ seconded staffing structure before moving to a permanent establishment is widely supported by members with a lot of positive feedback on the staff in the interim establishment.
- One phase that did not go so well was the transit from an interim to a permanent establishment. In particular documentation to support key decisions has been lost in this process.
- With the benefit of hindsight it would have been beneficial to speed up the migration to a permanent establishment and the sequencing of recruitment so the permanent Chief Executive was not one of the last appointments.
- Other audit reviews undertaken by ourselves have highlighted that reliance on an interim establishment did not demonstrate VFM, with regard to at least one specific appointment (Rec.7)

An examination of the Authority's HQ accommodation strategy and associated decision-making and implementation.

- Defra conditions for the funding of HQ Accommodation were not communicated in writing. This created concerns about the decision process for the purchasing of Capron House, which would otherwise have not been there. (Rec.8)
- The process of locating and deciding on an HQ is documented and evidenced but we could not locate background documents to confirm the robustness of all aspects of this process. (Rec. 9)
- There is substantial (but not universal) agreement by the members interviewed that the purchase of Capron House was the best option available. More work is required to develop sustainable transport policies and strategies to compensate for the absence of good public transport links. (Rec. 10)
- High expectations and remaining uncertainties mean that close monitoring of the costs of the Capron House is essential together with communication of the budget implications to members. (Rec. 11)

## Detailed Report

### 1. A description of the context within which the set-up took place.

#### Budgets and resources

- 1.1 There was uncertainty about the available budget for the SDNPA at its inception. A provisional budget for of £8.4m in 2010/11 was reduced to £7.2m. A planning grant of £4.4 million was also provided in 2011/12. The budget for 2013/14 is £10.6m.
- 1.2 The 2010/11 budget was a transitional budget to cover the initial set up costs with the 2011/12 budget being the Authority's first full operational budget.
- 1.3 It is evident that uncertainties about this budget settlement and the Comprehensive Spending Review impacted on the timing of some key decisions about the staffing establishment and other resourcing of the National Park Authority.

#### **Recommendation 1. (For Defra)**

**The provision of budget certainty at an early stage would assist the process of setting up any future bodies.**

#### Expectations

- 1.4 Our review of key documentation and interviews with members and officers identified a number of consistent themes with regard to the expectations about the SDNPA. There are no specific written requirements from Defra beyond those contained in the Statutory Instrument. We understand that some of this information was obtained through undocumented meetings of officers and members with representatives of Defra.
- 1.5 Some priorities can be chased back to references in the inspectors reports, particularly that of 2006. They include, for example:-
  - Efficient decision-making structures.
  - Wide consultation on the management plan.
  - Arrangements to involve local people and other stakeholders.
  - Forging strategic partnerships with both the statutory and voluntary sector.
- 1.6 In addition in a letter from Defra dated March 2009 clear expectations are provided about the arrangements for delivering a Planning function i.e.

“Given its exceptionally large population, and the number of local authorities having land within the Park, the Secretary of State takes the view that the South Downs National Park Authority should delegate its development control work so far as possible to its constituent local authorities.”

- 1.7 Undocumented expectations that have been consistently expressed include that the SDNPA should:-
- be an enabling authority
  - maintain a lean staffing model
- 1.8 Statutory Instrument 2010, 497 includes details of governance arrangements in relation to appointments and meetings. The letter from Defra dated the 31 March 2009 details the statutory purposes of a National Park Authority and detailed boundary considerations.

#### **Recommendation 2. (For Defra)**

**The provision of a written statement of any specific Defra expectations may enhance transparency for members during the early stages of the set-up of any future bodies.**

#### Establishing the priorities for the National Park

- 1.9 Feedback from our interviews confirmed that work to develop a framework of principles for the operation of the NPA began promptly following the appointment of members in 2010 who worked with a small group of officers in post at the time. These arrangements included a meeting in May 2010 where a set of Guiding Principles (see Appendix 2) were drafted and approved. Feedback obtained indicates that members are satisfied that these principles provided context for the development of the Authority and its services during the shadow year; although not all members were fully in support of these at the point they were agreed.
- 1.10 The Guiding Principles are now supplemented by a Vision Statement which was approved in July 2012 and detailed Business Plans published for both the 2011/12 and 2012/13 Financial years.
- 1.11 Neither of these documents replace the statutory requirement for a Management Plan which is required to be produced within three years of the park being operational “which formulates its policy for the management of the relevant Park and for the carrying out of its functions in relation to that Park.” This Plan is currently in development and is due for completion in November 2013. A Management Plan was put in place by the SDJC but was not adopted. A new Corporate Plan is currently being prepared and this will provide operational clarity over priorities for the next 3 years.

#### **Recommendation 3. (For the SDNPA)**

**The Corporate Plan clearly demonstrates operational priorities for the next 3 years.**

## Communication

- 1.12 There is consensus that officer/ member communications have been good, the exception to this being during the period of migration from temporary/interim staff to a permanent establishment. Some members felt that officer/member communication deteriorated during this period although these issues have now been resolved.
- 1.13 With regard to wider issues of communication within the organisation and stakeholders there is a clear view that these could have been improved particularly in the early days of the organisation. One observation was that although the NPA was effectively engaging with existing stakeholders it was much less effective at engaging with the new ones including the general public and users of the National Park. This issue appears to be more about corporate culture than policies and strategies.

### **Recommendation 4. (For the SDNPA)**

**Further work should be carried out to improve the effectiveness of communication both within the organisation and to stakeholders.**

## **2. An examination of the publicly announced timetable leading to full operation on 1 April 2011.**

- 2.1 At a high level key dates for the set-up and operation of the national park were:

Formal Approval of SDNPA by the Secretary of State-	March 2010
Member Inductions	March 2010
Commencement of Shadow Year	April 2010
Guiding Principles adopted.	May 2010
Agreement to purchase Capron House signed	March 2011
Commencement of 1 <sup>st</sup> Operational Year including Planning Service	April 2011
Agreement of Vision Statement	July 2012
Purchase of Capron House (completion)	November 2012

- 2.2 Our interviews highlighted that since inception, and particularly during the shadow year there were high workloads for both officers and members.
- 2.3 There is a consensus that there have been considerable achievements but that a number of factors have led to a fire fighting approach being taken on some issues. It was expressed to us that a one year shadow period was not a long time in practice, particularly when one of the tasks was to set-up the planning service with a big decision being made about how to structure this. One valid suggestion was that it would have helped to have an additional year to deliver the planning project as this would have allowed resources to be used on other aspects of the NPA set-up in the shadow year.

- 2.4 Officers have identified a lack of formal project planning for some aspects of the SDNPA including the workforce strategy. There is insufficient evidence as to whether this was because formal project management arrangements were not adopted or that the evidence was not retained.

**Recommendation 5. (For the SDNPA)**

**Formal project and programme management techniques should be applied to all capital and high profile projects. Evidence (project plans, timetables, meeting minutes etc) should be retained to allow independent scrutiny, post project evaluation and to enhance accountability.**

- 2.5 Although many aspects of the NPA were successfully put in place during the shadow year there were highlighted shortfalls in a number of areas. These were identified as:-
- Implementation of some IT systems
  - Contracts and procurement
- 2.6 Issues with regard to contracts and procurement have been subject to ongoing management scrutiny and have been reviewed and reported on by ourselves (Internal Audit) with two “Limited Assurance” reports issued one in 2010/11 and one in 2011/12. It is hoped that the 2012/13 review can report an improved position.

**Recommendation 6. (For the SDNPA)**

**In accordance the findings of other Internal Audit reports the National Park Authority should continue to closely monitor and improve its IT and Procurement processes.**

- 2.7 There were some decisions that were made early in the process. These were:
- The decision to undertake planning using agency arrangements.
  - The decision to establish an outward facing delivery function and subsequent transfer of SDJC staff.
  - The decision about the purchase of Capron House.
- 2.8 The third decision regarding the purchase of Capron is discussed in detail in section 5 of this report.

**3. An examination of the basis of the transfer of the South Downs Joint Committee on 1 April 2011.**

- 3.1 A transition plan was prepared and reported to an NPA meeting on the 17 November 2010. The plan proposed that the SDJC activities as they stood would be run until the end of December 2010. Following this staff identified as transferring to the NPA would be seconded to the SDNPA. It went on to propose that the day to day responsibility for delegated tasks would be undertaken by seconded SDJC staff up to the end of March 2011. A



detailed project plan was prepared to help manage the transition arrangements.

3.2 A number of key principles were adopted as follows:

- no disruption or deterioration in service during the transition;
- a smooth handover of people, assets and information to ensure that the work to conserve the South Downs (through the NPA and local authority partners) is not disrupted;
- a fair and equitable settlement between the SDJC and NPA in respect of the sale of assets, the secondment of staff to the NPA and the resolution of SDJC outstanding assets and liabilities;
- a clear, open and transparent approach which respects the views and needs of staff.

3.3 A key decision was made in June 2010 that the NPA would have a Ranger service. This decision was deliberately made out of sequence with other staffing decisions to mitigate uncertainty about SDJC funding and the impact on staff morale.

#### TUPE Arrangements

3.4 Probably the most significant organisational task and decision regarding the transfer of responsibilities and resources related to the transfer of SDJC staff. This involved consideration of legal obligations under TUPE and other relevant legislation.

3.5 Information passed to us indicates that a process was followed that involved matching the requirements and job descriptions of the NPA to that of SDJC staff. There was some frustration from staff about the time the process took.

3.6 A staff survey last year revealed there is still a degree of unhappiness following the staff transfer but with a small number of exceptions there is now a belief that this has improved. This function is important as Rangers provide a practical link with landowners.

3.7 Uncertainty about the budget for the NPA did not assist the planning and management of the transfer process.

#### Management Plan

3.8 A point of discussion and debate between members was about whether the SDJC Management Plan should have been adopted by the NPA. The plan was a well presented and substantial document of almost 150 pages in total but was ultimately not adopted by the SDNPA.

3.9 Reasons put forward for not adopting the plan were that:-

- There had been an actual (or perceived) lack of consultation when it was compiled and/or that it did not sufficiently demonstrate a partnership approach.
  - A perception that the SDNPA would not have sufficient ownership of a plan it did not put together.
- 3.10 It has been explained that it would have been difficult (or impossible) to adopt the plan because although legislation (Section 66, 2 of the Environment Act 1995) allows an NPA to adopt an existing National Park Plan this did not cover the plan produced by the Joint Committee under different legislation.
- 3.11 There is evidence that not all members were initially completely happy with the decision not to adopt the SDJC plan but the decision has now been accepted.
- 3.12 One implication of not adopting the SDJC management plan is that the SDNPA is operating without a Management Plan. At present the NPA is relying on its Guiding Principles, Vision Statement and Business Plans to provide a strategy for the overall management of the park. The SDNPA has until the March 2014 to put a plan in place which is currently at the consultation stage in its development.

#### Rights of Way

- 3.13 There was specific reference in the 2006 inspection report that a “South Downs National Park Authority should play a leading role in management and improvements to rights of way”... “If possible, as a result of the National Park Review, rights of way powers should be transferred to a South Downs National Park Authority”. This is was also an expectation of some members.
- 3.14 We understand that management of rights of way is undertaken by some National Park Authorities but not others. The role was carried out by the SDJC before the SDNPA came into being.
- 3.15 The SDNPA is not delivering this service in-house. We understand that the principal reason for this is the statutory responsibility for this function lies with the County Councils as Highway Authorities and after some consideration the Authorities concerned made the decision not to delegate this function to the SDNPA. The South Downs Way is funded by the Highways Authority and Natural England. Some parts of it overlap with existing rights of way and therefore responsibility for maintaining it is split.
- 3.16 It was clear during this review that there was still some concern that the Authority does not deliver this service.

**4. An assessment of the first year of operation from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 including consideration of the balance of temporary versus contract staff in providing services.**

A workforce strategy

- 4.1 For the period up to November 2011 SDNPA had a considerable reliance on temporary staff. Initially these comprised secondments (from Defra and Natural England), interims or consultants.
- 4.2 We were not able to identify any strategy or equivalent document that explained this approach to members or the intended timetable for the migration from a temporary to a permanent establishment. Notwithstanding this we found that the policy to use temporary staff including an interim Chief Executive was clear and members were aware. It has been suggested that Defra had an influence on the strategy adopted but we have not seen any evidence on this either way.
- 4.3 A consideration was that up until April 2011 the NPA operated as a Shadow Authority. We understand this meant that there was an unwritten Defra expectation that permanent staff were not recruited substantially before this date.

Effectiveness of the Strategy Adopted

- 4.4 Feedback from members indicates a consensus that the temporary staff were working hard and that there was effective communication with members. Praise was given for specific members of the team and it was suggested that the temporary employment route may have been the only practical way to secure the employment of some individuals. In addition, secondments from Defra gave an insight into expectations and allowed effective knowledge transfer.
- 4.5 There is some consensus that the use of interims went on too long. Feedback was also obtained that the sequencing of the permanent recruitments (with hindsight) could have been improved so that the Chief Executives appointment was made prior to the filling of other senior management roles.
- 4.6 Areas of shortfall were in relation to contracts and procurement and there was consistent feedback that the management of IT services was not effective.

Migration to a permanent establishment

- 4.7 Our interviews highlighted a number of specific issues relating to the migration from a permanent to a temporary establishment. Feedback was obtained that communication with members deteriorated during the handover process. In addition the handover arrangements between permanent and temporary staff were incomplete particularly with regard to

the passing on of key documentation i.e. there has been frustration that documentation to back-up key decisions was not passed on by interim staff.

- 4.8 In addition to the written records from the interim management period a downside about the reliance on temporary staff was the loss of “corporate memory” when staff moved on. Because of the overriding reliance on temporary staff this has had a negative impact on the SDNPA and has meant that during this review much of the corporate memory was found to reside with members.

#### Financial Control and Value for Money

- 4.9 Our own internal audit work during 2010/11 and 2011/12 identified issues relating to contract and procurement management which included the identification of shortfalls with regard to the contractual documentation for some temporary appointments. This meant that in some instances the rate and terms being paid for temporary/ interim staff could not be substantiated before payment. It culminated in an investigation in mid 2011 that found that payments made to one interim were of a scale that offered poor value for money.
- 4.10 There are Value for Money risks with the employment of permanent staff as well as interims but these risks were not effectively managed at all times in the SDNPA set-up. A more mixed establishment of permanent and interim staff at an earlier stage of set-up may have helped to mitigate this risk.

#### **Recommendation 7. (For Defra and SDNPA)**

**The provision of guidance on the use of interims and consultants in the set-up any future bodies may be beneficial. In particular the pros and cons of an interim strategy should be highlighted including the risks relating to VFM.**

#### **5. An examination of the Authority’s HQ accommodation strategy and associated decision-making and implementation.**

- 5.1 The decision to purchase Capron House is one of the most high profile individual decisions the NPA has made. We note that the refurbishment is in progress and this project still encompasses a number of inherent risks.

#### Determining an HQ strategy

- 5.2 A NPA report of July 2010 entitled “Permanent Premises Report” recommended an approach to procuring permanent premises. It proposed that three principles be adopted i.e. that:-
- Premises that support effective delivery
  - Government policy on public sector estates
  - Local criteria. (The characteristics of premises may have an important impact on the NPA’s delivery of its role as well as the perceptions of stakeholders and staff.)

5.3 The July 2010 report refers to a stakeholder survey that received 220 replies and identified the following criteria.

- location of an HQ, roughly central to the park in a market town
- availability of good transport routes
- environmental impact / sustainability was important
- the building blending into its environs in terms of design
- area offices located in different parts of the park to support local delivery of the SDNPA's purposes and duty.

5.4 This was followed by an a report on the “Estates Strategy and Long Term Headquarters” in September 2010 that recommended the purchase and refurbishment of Capron House.

#### Funding and Defra Requirements

5.5 We were informed that in 2010 Defra had some capital funding (£1m) that had been earmarked for the New Forest which they then offered to the SDNPA. This later became £1.3m. Defra are understood to have made the funding available subject to the conditions that (1) a public sector property was acquired and (2) contracts were exchanged by the 31/3/2011.

5.6 We understand these criteria were not detailed in writing but that members were informed that a time limited decision needed to be made. We received some feedback that members would have preferred longer to make this decision if this funding deadline had not been in place.

#### **Recommendation 8. (For the SDNPA)**

**Confirmation of any future funding conditions for should be sought in writing.**

#### Options Appraisal

5.7 Documentation examined indicates that an options appraisal was undertaken but there is insufficient information for us to carry out a detailed review of the costings of the shortlisted options. A matrix was prepared to evaluate these options with three key requirements i.e. that the property effectively supported service delivery, it was public sector owned and it was centrally located.

5.8 We understand that the number of suitable options identified was limited despite significant attempts being made to locate potential properties through estate agents and other third parties. Of those identified it was considered that there were only three practical options that were put forward for more detailed comparison and evaluation. These were Patcham Place, Brighton; Capron House, Midhurst; and The Police Station, Lewes.

5.9 Our review of documentation provided showed that an options appraisal was carried out using the agreed criteria. It is less clear how robust this appraisal was as we did not have access to any additional documentation or working papers.

## Costing and budget management

- 5.10 A report to the NPA in September 2010 gave an estimated cost of the Capron House Project as £1.5 million (including a deduction for rent to be recovered from the school after the purchase). This included both the purchase and refurbishment costs. We could not locate any supplementary documentation to allow an independent assessment of the robustness of this costing. Feedback suggests that this amount was not supported by detailed costings, surveys or similar.
- 5.11 By December 2010 a revised estimate of £1.9 million was produced. By May 2012 a revised capital budget of £2.8 million was reported. It is our understanding that recent tender receipts indicate that the budget may need to rise further.
- 5.12 Based on the information we have seen the original £1.5 million estimate is a rough figure which is not costed in detail and was not informed by any surveys.
- 5.13 Members expressed some concern that they are not sufficiently kept informed of the increase in the cost of the project.
- 5.14 There is an understanding that the increase from the original costing is partly due to additional works to meet BREAM accreditation standards and other additions such as a front canopy and a lift. We have not seen any analysis to reconcile the current anticipated expenditure with the original of £1.5 million.

### **Recommendation 9. (For the SDNPA)**

**Background papers should be prepared and retained to support option appraisals in Committee Reports. Officers should seek to provide transparency about any costs which have been estimated before surveys or other detailed cost assessments have been completed.**

## Decision making

- 5.15 Overall feedback from members was that they felt that a reasonable and sensible decision had been made on the purchase of Capron House but there is not yet a 100 percent consensus that the correct decision has been made. We understand the decision was taken by the full Authority in accordance with its formal decision making arrangements.
- 5.16 One key area not addressed from the original stakeholder consultation on this project is that relating to the availability of good public transport routes. We did note discussion about improving public transport access for staff to Capron House in some initial project papers but in practice the NPA has only have limited influence on enhancing public transport to the site. As the next alternative the Authority needs to consider the introduction of policies

and strategies to encourage the use of more sustainable travel and working arrangements where these are available.

**Recommendation 10. (For the SDNPA)**

**The Authority should develop policies and strategies to encourage the use of more sustainable transport options to Capron House by staff and members . This could include encouraging the use of initiatives such as car sharing, video conferencing and minimising unnecessary journeys.**

Future risks

- 5.17 The Capron House Project is still at the early stage of refurbishment. There are high expectations about the finished building and still uncertainties relating to some of the costs of the refurbishment. These factors together mean that there is a significant risk that the costs of this project will escalate further. There was some feedback from members that they do not have sufficient information about the cost increases to date.
- 5.18 Arrangements should be put in place to ensure that there is close monitoring of interim valuations and that any substantial design or additional cost items are not approved without full consideration of the cost implications with update reports for members being prepared as appropriate.

**Recommendation 11. (For the SDNPA)**

**The Capron House project should be closely monitored and a mechanism put in place to ensure that there is timely scrutiny of any cost increases and the reasons behind these.**

Note. The two dates in **bold** were amended following the presentation to the Standards and Audit Committee in September 2012

### **Terms of Reference for Standards and Audit Committee Review of the Set-up of the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA)**

#### **Purpose**

The SDNPA is now a well-established authority with effective governance and operational stability. In common with good practice, now is an appropriate time for an internal Standards and Audit Committee assessment of any lessons that can be learnt from the establishment of the SDNPA including its HQ accommodation strategy.

The aim will be to:

- a) Present a short note to Defra of any key lessons to be learnt from the set-up of the SDNPA to assist them in the future establishment of any similar bodies;
- b) Advise the NPA on any lessons to be learnt for the SDNPA arising from the set-up, including the HQ accommodation strategy;
- c) Make recommendations to the SDNPA in relation to any changes that might be necessary to the SDNPA's framework of governance and accountability.

#### **Governance**

A one-off exercise by the SDNPA Standards and Audit Committee, carried out by internal audit and managed by a steering group accountable to the Committee consisting of the Chair of Standards and Audit, an independent member of the Committee, another SDNPA Member, the Director of Corporate Services and another member of staff.

#### **Method**

The work will be undertaken by internal audit, guided by the steering group and under the day to day oversight of Hélène Rossiter. It will be carried out primarily through a review of the key documents and informal discussions. There will be no formal evidence or hearings.

#### **Timescale**

These terms of reference will be considered by the meeting of the Standards and Audit Committee on 13 September and the exercise will be launched by a meeting of the steering group in early October. The draft report will be presented to the **5 March 2013** meeting of the Standards and Audit Committee. Any necessary additional work will be undertaken in early 2013 and the Committee's conclusions will be presented to the **19 March 2013** NPA alongside an action plan for any proposed changes in the SDNPA's policies or procedures.



## **Scope**

The review should focus on the strategic issues and any lessons to be learnt for the future. It should be guided by the following work plan:

- a) A description of the context within which the set-up took place. This should include the context in which the set-up took place, the resources available to the set-up team, the operating model and the high expectations of the National Park, taking into consideration Defra expectations and requirements;
- b) An examination of the publicly announced timetable leading to full operation on 1 April 2011;
- c) An examination of the basis of the transfer of the South Downs Joint Committee on 1 April 2011;
- d) An assessment of the first year of operation from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 including consideration of the balance of temporary versus contract staff in providing services;
- e) An examination of the Authority's HQ accommodation strategy and associated decision-making and implementation.

## **Conclusions**

In the light of all of the above:

- What lessons, if any, can be learnt by:
  - a) Defra;
  - b) SDNPA?
- What changes, if any, should be made to the current HQ accommodation strategy?
- What changes, if any, should be made to the current governance of the SDNPA?

### Guiding Principles

Overarching statement:

***The South Downs National Park is a protected, working, special landscape that is loved, enjoyed and respected by local communities, visitors and the Nation.***

The South Downs is loved and protected for its special qualities – its beautiful and diverse landscapes of ancient woodlands, heathland, rivers, iconic cliffs and coast: the rolling chalk Downlands, and the Western Weald – supporting a network of unique and internationally important wildlife.

Its distinctive towns and villages and the wealth of archaeology, history, both cultural and military, and agricultural traditions are valued and celebrated, telling a story of how people have shaped the South Downs.

All people feel welcome and benefit from being able to enjoy the South Downs National Park– to experience a sense of space and awe – to get away from it all. People are proud of the South Downs National Park and there is a widespread understanding of and respect for the South Downs National Park as a special place.

People enjoy living and working in the vibrant and distinctive towns and villages of the South Downs and have a good understanding of the relationships and interdependencies between town and countryside. There is a thriving, dynamic economy that is sympathetic and responsive to the character of the area.

Everyone is working together for the benefit of the South Downs National Park to find solutions that meet the needs of the landscape, wildlife, people and businesses both now and in the future. Local people, businesses, visitors, farmers, land owners and managers, public and voluntary sector agencies and bodies are actively working in partnership together with the National Park Authority to meet local aspirations and the purposes of the National Park

The South Downs National Park not only remains an area of special beauty in the highly pressured environment of the southeast of England but takes on the challenges of sustainable living in the 21st century, especially the impacts of climate and population change.

### **The Role of the South Downs National Park Authority is to:**

- Champion the South Downs National Park 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 South Downs National Park 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 to 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
- Build effective partnerships to tackle the challenges facing the South Downs National Park, including climate change, demographic change and development pressures

## **The Culture of the South Downs National Park Authority**

- Valuing partnerships and the contribution that other people and organisations can make towards National Park purposes
- Respecting local people and visitors
- Releasing the potential of communities and other organisations
- Acting with integrity and local & national accountability
  - Listening, engaging and responding
  - Open and transparent
  - Evidence based
  - Inspiring, enterprising and innovative
  - Delivering value for money and effectiveness
  - Striving for best practise and excellence in all we do

## **Vision**

By 2050 in the South Downs National Park:

- the iconic English lowland landscapes and heritage will have been conserved and greatly enhanced. These inspirational and distinctive places, where people live, work, farm and relax, are adapting well to the impacts of climate change and other pressures;
- people will understand, value, and look after the vital natural services that the National Park provides. Large areas of high-quality and well-managed habitat will form a network supporting wildlife throughout the landscape;
- opportunities will exist for everyone to discover, enjoy, understand and value the National Park and its special qualities. The relationship between people and landscape will enhance their lives and inspire them to become actively involved in caring for it and using its resources more responsibly;
- its special qualities will underpin the economic and social well-being of the communities in and around it, which will be more self-sustaining and empowered to shape their own future. Its villages and market towns will be thriving centres for residents, visitors and businesses and supporting the wider rural community;
- successful farming, forestry, tourism and other business activities within the National Park will actively contribute to, and derive economic benefit from, its unique identity and special qualities.