

Report to **South Downs National Park**  
Date **22 May 2025**  
By **Performance and Projects Manager**  
Title of Report **Review of the South Downs National Park Partnership  
Management Plan - Engagement programme and Feedback**

**Decision**

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**Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to:**

**I. Note the engagement programme undertaken as part of the review of the South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan and the feedback from the engagement programme as set out at Appendices 2 and 3.**

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**I. Introduction**

- I.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of the engagement programme undertaken as part of the review of the Partnership Management Plan (PMP) and the findings.
- I.2 The NPA approved the approach to the review of the PMP at its meeting on 17 October 2024 (Report NPA24/25-15). This included the use of consultants to engage with stakeholders as part of developing a revised PMP. The other report on this agenda sets out the draft aims and objectives that have resulted from a consideration of drivers for change and the outcomes from the engagement programme.
- I.3 The Authority's approach to the review of the PMP for 2026-2031 is informed by an extensive evaluation of how the 2020-2025 plan was developed, which was carried out in 2020 by external consultants, Heritage Insider. The recommendations and a checklist are at **Appendix I**.
- I.4 The checklist focused on the process for a review:
- **Have a clear but flexible process:** can have flexibility to allow for organic development of ideas and ways of working where needed
  - **Big picture thinking** – 'stay in the helicopter' to see the macro view of how the next 5 years will move the SDNPA and partners along the path towards the 2050 vision
  - **Really understand what difference the PMP is making** – institute an adaptive management feedback loop
  - **Inclusive and diverse** – put diversity and inclusion at the heart of the process and work hard to remove barriers to participation
  - **Partnership, partnership, partnership** – place partners at the heart of the PMP process and shout about their work

- **Live and breathe the mission to connect people to SDNP** – use the PMP development process as an opportunity to build relations with residents through a fresh approach to dynamic and exciting conversations that inform the PMP
- **Bring the PMP to life** – Create advocacy tools for Members, Partners SDNPA Officers and beyond

## 2. Policy Context

- 2.1 In April 2024 Natural England produced draft management plan guidance for Protected Landscapes in England. The guidance was never formally published but was developed with input from Protected Landscapes. It has been used to guide the process for developing the Partnership Management Plan for the South Downs National Park.
- 2.2 According to the draft Management Plan Guidance from Natural England Effective management planning enables those involved with the Protected Landscape to set the agenda for change and manage change effectively. ‘Management planning’ is how Plans are produced, reviewed, and delivered. The process is as vital as the Plan itself and should:
- bring people together, build relationships and grow commitment
  - build consensus around a vision for the future
  - establish a Management Plan around which joint action can happen, and resources can be secured
- 2.3 It also states that Protected Landscapes teams are not expected to work alone. Management Plan review and delivery is a shared task.

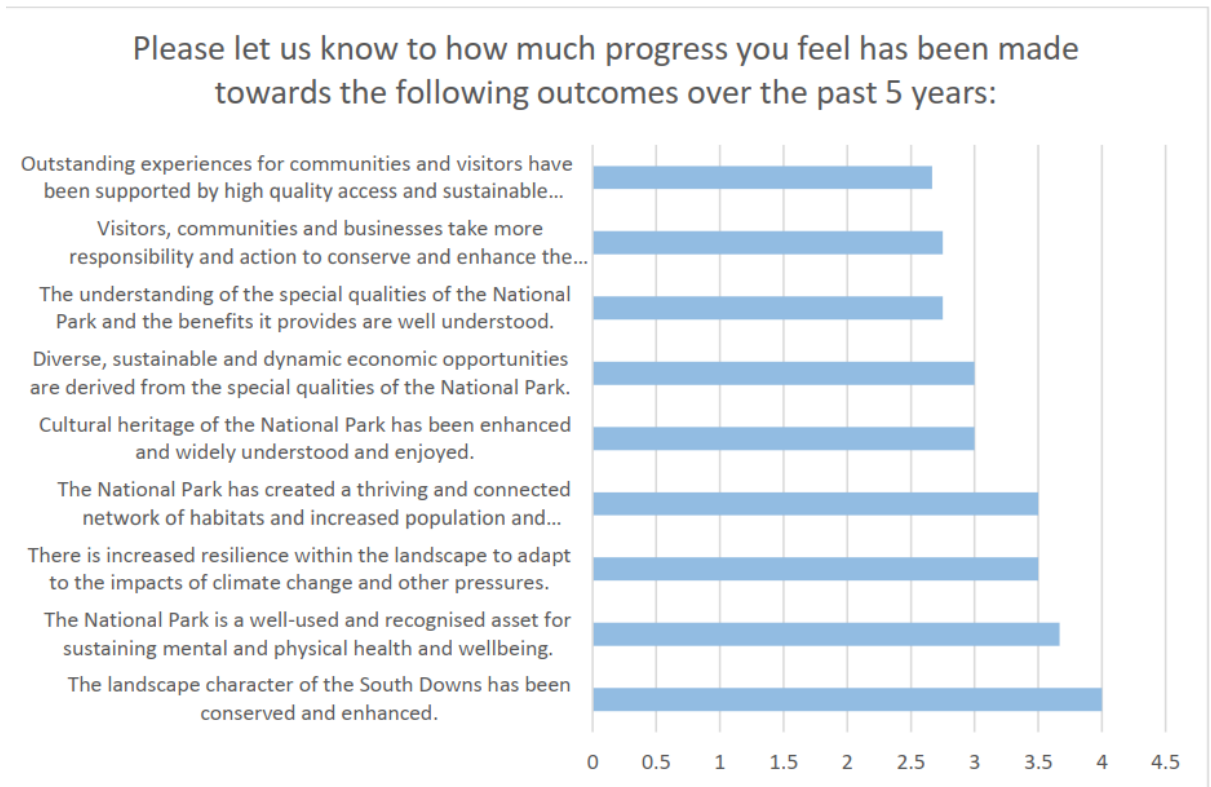
## 3. Issues for consideration

- 3.1 Following an open procurement process, Resources for Change (R4C) were commissioned by the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) to review the existing South Downs PMP 2020-25 and deliver a stakeholder engagement programme to support the development of the new PMP for 2026-31. R4C worked with consortium partners Diversity Resource International (DRI) and Youngwilders (YW). As agreed by Members the engagement focused on:
- Landowners, farmers and the local and rural business community
  - Community groups, local authorities, parish and town councils
  - Local communities within and residents outside the National Park
  - People living in urban areas, especially people facing socio-economic barriers to inclusion
  - Diverse communities
  - Young people (aged 18-30)
  - SDNPA staff, members and partners
- 3.2 A mixed-method approach was adopted involving 1,157 partners, stakeholders and members of the public through a stakeholder and partner online survey, and two phases of sector specific workshops and events.
- 3.3 The key themes that emerged through the engagement programme were, nature recovery, climate action, water management, young people (training and skills), a National Park that is valued, welcoming and accessible to all, cultural heritage and rural economy and businesses. Four cross cutting themes were also identified. Collaboration, welcome and diversity, engagement and communication and funding.
- 3.4 Creating a resilient landscape that is nature-rich was ranked by the majority as the number one priority for the new PMP. It was acknowledged that with so much of the land in private ownership, this will only be achieved if those working on and living off the land have strong, viable businesses that are working in harmony with nature.

- 3.5 The second highest priority was to do more to mitigate for and adapt to climate change, building on the excellent community initiatives over the last five years.
- 3.6 There is a growing interest in better management of water quality, nature-based flood management and waterway restoration, often expressed more widely through nature recovery.
- 3.7 There was a strong feeling from the community that young people were the future, and that they will be critical in addressing some of the key nature and climate issues being experienced. It was felt that there needed to be a renewed focus on teenagers and young people up to the age of 30, focusing on skills, training and careers.
- 3.8 Access is valued highly by most participants and was seen as essential for health and wellbeing. There is a need to strengthen accessibility and make the SDNP more available and welcoming to diverse communities, with information and behaviours reflecting that they are welcome in the SDNP. The poor public transport system was cited by many as a particular issue.
- 3.9 Cultural Heritage did not come across as a priority for many, but this may simply reflect that the heritage organisations were not as involved in this engagement process as other sectors. It was seen as important by young people.
- 3.10 There was enthusiasm from community stakeholders, rural businesses and landowners to engage with and embrace the SDNP. Thriving communities and rural economy underpins people's ability and motivations to deliver better outcomes for nature and climate.
- 3.11 Details of the engagement and recommendations are at **Appendix 2**. The annex to the engagement report is at **Appendix 3**. As with any research or engagement activity there were research limitations that have impacted the results within this report, that should be born in mind when interpreting the findings. These are set out in section 4.3.1 of the report at Appendix 2.

Review of achievement against PMP 2020-25 outcomes

- 3.12 A review of delivery against the current plan was also undertaken this included: a desk-based review of the State of the Park Report, and other published information as well as a partner survey, and one to one interviews. The research has identified a wide range of activity across all aims and objectives by SDNPA and partners. Key highlights include a range of partnership projects, networks, membership schemes, policies, cultural and educational programmes, and volunteering initiatives that immersed local people and visitors in the South Downs National Park (SDNP), promoting the economy, health and wellbeing, helping protect landscape character and addressing nature recovery.
- 3.13 However, there is still much to be done, and challenges include the need for more joined up and larger scale habitat restoration, further engagement of partners in PMP development and delivery, improvements to accessibility and public transport, further support for farming and rural businesses, engaging young people and addressing skills gaps in green skills and traditional crafts, welcoming diversity and more emphasis on nature recovery and climate action. Detail can be found in appendix 2 of the Annex which is at **Appendix 3**.
- 3.14 The report sets out some learning points for the future. The main challenges to implementing the outcomes in the PMP were cited as lack of knowledge of the PMP and lack of organisational buy-in. There was a low response rate to the questions for partners so there are limitations on how much can be inferred from that feedback. The table below sets out reflections on how much progress has been made against the PMP 2020-25 outcomes over the last 5 years.



**4. Timescale**

4.1 Engagement activities ran from October 2024 until March 2025. There were a number of workshops early in the process for Members and staff. After that the **first phase of engagement** with stakeholders started. In the first set of workshops, a range of methodologies were used with different audiences to identify and test what the emerging priorities might be for the next Partnership Management Plan. Specific workshop events were attended by 147 people. This approach was consistent but, in some instances, curtailed if the event was part of an event that was already happening, such as events for the Local Plan or Dark Night Skies events, or as part of an existing networking meeting. Public events saw 283 people actively engage with the PMP, even though there were more people than this at these events. There were also 3 specific events run for young people as part of this phase attended by around 90 people. There were also 8 events that sought feedback from diverse groups attended by 108 people.

4.2 Following on the first round of engagement, an interim report was completed, which identified several emerging priorities. The **second round of events**, focussed on further prioritisation based on the findings in the interim report and the development of measures or actions and pledges. These events were less well attended with 108 people in total, some of whom were the same people as attended the first round of meetings.

4.3 During February and March 2025 an online survey was sent to the PMP distribution list of approximately 700 partner contacts, shared through some sector stakeholder and partner newsletters and networks, and with the public in attendance at the PMP engagement events, including the Dark Skies events. The survey was a mechanism to capture information from stakeholders who were part of the co-creation of the draft PMP, who couldn't attend a workshop or wanted to add additional information. 126 responses were received through the survey.

**5. Options & cost implications**

5.1 The Authority has £75,000 allocated to the PMP review (£35k agreed in March 2024 and £40k agreed in July 2024) for work required during this financial year. This budget will fund the two contracts let to support the review. £50,000 was allocated in the 2025-26 budget to support the production of the PMP.

**6. Next steps**

6.1 The consultation on the draft Vision and PMP and engagement with stakeholders on the delivery plan for the PMP will take place over the summer and will be carried out by SDNPA staff and Members. The learning from the engagement has fed into the draft PMP and will also be used to inform the work of the SDNPA over the next year. Some of the feedback will be used to develop a new Communications Strategy and other recommendations will inform other areas of work, this will be developed through the corporate planning process.

**7. Other implications**

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	Following the consultations, the PMP will be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee in November 2025, prior to being presented to the NPA for approval in December 2025.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	The financial resource implications are covered in section 4 above.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Procurement processes for the consultants engaged have been carried out using Most Economically Advantageous Tender methodology with the aim of obtaining the best possible value for money through that process.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	The review of the PMP will result in a new 5-year PMP with new outcomes, from which a new 5-year Corporate Plan will also flow. The PMP is vital to the SDNPA delivering on the purposes of the National Park.
Links to other projects or partner organisations	The review of the PMP is fundamentally a partnership exercise and the revised plan will be a shared set of ambitions, outcomes and an agreed delivery plan with measurable targets agreed with partners.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	The PMP will be one of the main strategic mechanisms to support action for climate change mitigation and adaptation. It will incorporate the climate change action plan we already have.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	None
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	An intrinsic part of the process is the carrying out of an equalities impact assessment which will be carried out as part of the PMP review.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	None
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	None

Implication	Yes*/No
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	The Engagement consultants were required to ensure that all staff working with vulnerable people were DRB checked, and required to familiarise themselves with and adhere to the SDNPA safeguarding policy.
Are there any Data Protection implications?	It is likely that some data relating to partners will need to be collected to allow engagement to take place. We will ensure that all data protection principles are followed when dealing with personal data. Provisions on data protection for consultants are a standard part of the procurement process.

## 8. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
The lessons from the engagement are not taken on board	2	4	<p>There is a good feedback loop from the engagement findings into the revised draft PMP. The information from the engagement programme will also help to shape the corporate plan and future work priorities for the organisation – this will begin to be developed in the Autumn and will run for 5 years alongside the PMP.</p> <p>Publication of the report shows a willingness to be transparent and open to feedback.</p>

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Appendices

1. Recommendations and checklist from Heritage Insider review
2. SDNP PMP Review and Engagement Report 20205
3. SDNP PMP Review and Engagement – Annex

SDNPA Consultees Chief Executive; Director of Landscape and Strategy; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services,

External Consultees None

Background Documents [Report to NPA meeting 17 October 2024](#)  
[Report to Policy & Resources Committee & Appendices](#)  
[National Paks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949](#)  
[Environment Act 1995](#)

[Natural Environment and Rural Communities \(NERC\) Act 2006](#)

[UK Environmental-improvement-plan](#)

Natural England Draft Management Plan Guidance for Protected Landscapes in England

Planning the journey to a visionary future; a review of the South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan development process. Heritage Insider - September 2020

