

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING

Held at 1.00pm on 8 July 2025 in the Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre, North Street, Midhurst, West Sussex, GU29 9DH.

Present:

Vanessa Rowlands (Chair), Alun Alesbury, Heather Baker, Paul Bevan, Tim Burr, Antonia Cox, John Cross, Debbie Curnow-Ford, Chris Dowling, Janet Duncton, Theresa Fowler, Joan Grech, Melanie Hunt, Stephen McAuliffe, Robert Mocatta, Jerry Pett, Mark Potter, Steven Ridgeon, Andrew Shaxson, Daniel Stewart-Roberts, and Vicki Wells.

South Downs National Park Authority Officers:

Siôn McGeever (Chief Executive Officer), Laura Sercombe (Director of Landscape and Strategy), Tim Slaney (Director of Planning), James Winkworth (Director of Growth and Business Development) Annie Barnes (Deputy Monitoring Officer), Richard Fryer (Senior Governance Officer), Craig Garoghan (Chief Finance Officer (Interim)), Richard Sandiford (Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer), Stephanie Summers (Project Manager for Ouse Valley Climate Action), and Victoria Turner (Head of Finance and Corporate Services).

Also attended by: Sarah Thompson (Boardroom Apprentice)

CHIEF EXECUTIVES'S OPENING REMARKS

1. The Chief Executive Officer welcomed all present and informed them of general housekeeping matters.

ITEM 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. Apologies were received from Mark Fairweather, John Hyland, Gary Marsh and Stephen Whale.

ITEM 2. ELECTION OF CHAIR

3. Vanessa Rowlands, as the sole nominee, was duly elected Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority until the Authority AGM in 2026.

ITEM 3. ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIR

4. The Chair thanked Tim Burr for his work as Deputy Chair of the Authority for the previous two years.
5. Mark Potter, as the sole nominee, was duly elected Deputy Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority until the Authority AGM in 2026.

CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

6. Members and members of the public were reminded that South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) Members had a primary responsibility for ensuring that the Authority furthered the National Park Purposes and Duty. Members regarded themselves first and foremost as Members of the Authority and would act in the best interests of the National Park as a whole, rather than as representatives of their appointing body or any interest groups.
7. The Chair informed Members that Agenda Items 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 were to note and these items were taken as noted as no Member indicated that they had any matters related to these items that they wished to discuss.

ITEM 4. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

8. There were no declarations made.

ITEM 5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 27 MARCH AND 22 MAY 2025

9. The minutes of the Authority meetings held on 27 March and 22 May 2025 were approved as a correct record with the following corrections:

- Minute 262, sixth bullet point should read 'is' rather than 'if'.
- Minute 291, third bullet point should read 'there' rather than 'this'.

ITEM 6. URGENT MATTERS

10. There were no urgent matters.

ITEM 7. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

11. There were no public speakers.

ITEM 8. NEED FOR PART II EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

12. The Chair informed the Authority if any Member wished to discuss any matter on Appendix 5 at Agenda Item 12 then the meeting would consider going into a private session at that point.

ITEM 9. AUTHORITY CHAIR UPDATE

13. The Authority Chair introduced the report (NPA25/26-01) and provided the following updates:

- A correction to paragraph 2.21: Doug Jones was the Chair of the Local Access Forum.
- The Cockshut Restoration Project was a winner at the Sussex Heritage Awards on 2 July 2025.

14. **RESOLVED:** The Authority noted the update from the Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority.

ITEM 10. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S PROGRESS REPORT

15. The Chief Executive introduced the report (NPA25/26-02).

16. Members made the following comments:

- Clarification was sought regarding the anticipated changes to the offer to farmers referenced in paragraph 2.5 of the report.
- Welcomed the continued prioritisation of affordable housing but expressed surprise at the reported figure of only 32 homes. Clarification was sought as to whether data was available on the total number of affordable homes delivered to date.
- Encouraged wider promotion of the Buriton Village Hall case study, noting its potential value to other communities considering similar renovation projects.
- Supported the revised reporting format, particularly the alignment of progress updates with Corporate Plan targets, which was considered helpful and informative.
- Clarification was sought on the meaning of the term "measured approach to delivery" as referenced in paragraph 3.1 of the report.
- Welcomed the positive performance against the National Park for All targets and expressed support for an ambitious target in the next Corporate Plan.

17. Members were advised:

- Further details were awaited from Defra on potential changes to the offer to farmers. It was noted that the Sustainable Farming Initiative had been closed early, and initial indications suggested a shift towards nature-based outcomes, a more geographically

targeted approach, and the potential introduction of means testing. Once formal guidance was received, the Authority would consider how best to support farmers within the revised framework.

- The figure of 32 affordable homes related specifically to the scheme referenced in the report. The Authority typically delivered between 40 -50 affordable homes annually. Of the 2,000 extant planning permissions, approximately 520 were for affordable housing, and Officers expressed a strong desire to see those permissions delivered.
- Officers would raise the Buriton Village Hall story with the Comms team for wider promotion.
- The ‘measured approach to delivery’ referred to the uneven distribution of projects across reporting periods. A significant number of projects had been delivered in the previous year, with further schemes anticipated for future delivery.

18. **RESOLVED:** The Authority noted the progress made by the South Downs National Park Authority (the Authority) since the last report.

ITEM II. OUSE VALLEY CLIMATE ACTION UPDATE

19. The Ouse Valley Climate Action Project Manager provided a verbal update.

20. Members made the following comments:

- Expressed support for the project’s aims to dispel myths, reduce fear, and empower communities in responding to the challenge of climate change. It was noted that understanding how best to achieve this and how to equip local groups remained a key priority.
- Noted the comment on the National Lottery’s priority of engaging deprived communities and requested further information on the outcomes of OVCA’s work in Peacehaven.
- Emphasised the importance of gateway and interpretation signage in enhancing public understanding and engagement.
- Clarification was sought on how OVCA ensured its activities complemented, rather than duplicated, the energy advice and support already provided by Local Authorities.
- Queried whether there was scope for a future iteration of the OVCA programme, building on the lessons learned from this project.
- Observed that Civica had not fully met the needs of the project and sought clarification on what alternative solutions the Authority might consider for similar future initiatives.
- Noted the potential synergy between OVCA and the Knowledge Hub.

21. Members were advised:

- OVCA had engaged with the Peacehaven parish council, the community orchard and Peacehaven Community School. It was noted that the lack of accessible community space had presented a constraint. Funding had been allocated for the development of the Peacehaven Climate Hub.
- The OVCA energy team had worked in close collaboration with District, Town, and Parish Councils, including the organisation of joint events.
- OVCA had supported grassroots groups by incubating and accelerating their development. It was noted that the evolving devolution landscape presented both risks and opportunities. Officers were actively considering options for developing OVCA’s legacy, which could include expanding beyond the current geographic remit.

- Civica’s full capabilities had not been utilised during the project and Officers were exploring how to better leverage existing system functions. It was highlighted that Brighton & Hove had used Civica to manage large-scale projects of a similar nature. Feedback from OVCA would be incorporated into ongoing improvements to project management and monitoring systems over the coming months.
- OVCA had worked closely with the Climate Change Officer. It was acknowledged that some challenges had arisen regarding community group engagement, and these learnings were being considered as part of the legacy planning process.
- Lewes District Council had been a strong supporter of the OVCA project. Its imminent dissolution was felt keenly, particularly as much of the legacy planning had been based on the Council’s continued involvement and support.

22. Mark Potter briefly left the meeting.

ITEM 12. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES AND OUTSIDE BODIES

23. The Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer introduced, and Members considered the report (NPA25/26-03).

24. **RESOLVED:** The Authority:

1. Appointed the Planning Committee, Policy and Resources Committee and Appointments, Management & Standards Committee, with the Terms of Reference set out at Appendix 1, as the committees necessary to discharge the functions of the Authority.
2. Appointed the Membership of Committees until the Authority AGM in 2026 as set out in Appendix 3 (tabled at the meeting) to this report.
3. Appointed the Chair and Deputy Chair of Planning Committee until the Authority AGM in 2026 as set out in Appendix 4 (tabled at the meeting) of this report.
4. Appointed the Chair and Deputy Chairs of Policy & Resources Committee until the Authority AGM in 2026 as set out in Appendix 4 (tabled at the meeting) of this report.
5. Appointed the named individual as set out in exempt Appendix 5 to serve as a non-voting co-opted member on the Policy and Resources Committee until the Authority AGM in 2029.
6. Appointed the Members to outside bodies and panels and the NPA-appointed Trustees of the South Downs National Park Trust until the Authority AGM in 20256 as set out in Appendix 7 (tabled at the meeting) of this report.
7. Agreed, for the purposes of Standing order 8.1(f), that, in line with the Authority’s established practice, the Committees appointed by the Authority may not arrange for the discharge of the Authority’s functions by a sub-committee. All Committees retained powers under Standing Order 27 to establish Member Task and Finish Groups.

ITEM 13. REVISIONS TO STANDING ORDERS

25. The Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer introduced, and Members considered the report (NPA25/26-04).

26. **RESOLVED:** The Authority agreed the revised Standing Orders for Regulation of Authority Proceedings and Business (“Standing Orders”) as set out at Appendix 1 and instructed the Chief Executive to publish the updated Standing Orders on the Authority’s website.

ITEM 14. REVISED CAPITAL PROGRAMME

27. The Interim Chief Finance Officer introduced, and Members considered the report (NPA25/26-05).

28. The Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee noted that this item had come to the Policy and Resources Committee, the importance of the capital budget being spent within year and the need for Officers to be able to respond quickly to deliver on that target.
29. Members made the following comments:
- Seven Sisters Country Park and Centurion Way represented two significant investment projects and requested information on the total expenditure to date, in order to contextualise the in-year spend. It was acknowledged that final costs for such projects often exceeded initial estimates.
 - They observed an apparent expectation from government that the Authority should move towards greater financial self-sufficiency. They questioned whether that the report could have placed greater emphasis on the use of capital to support future income generation.
 - Noted that credible income generating projects, particularly those at scale, required significant lead-in time. Advancing projects already in the pipeline was considered a pragmatic response to the shortened timescales imposed by government.
 - Clarification was sought as to whether Hampshire County Council had been informed of the removal of funds allocated for Queen Elizabeth Country Park (QECP) from the Authority's budget.
30. Members were advised:
- The revised project reporting format would capture all costs from inception to completion. It was noted that Seven Sisters Country Park was treated as a separate programme comprising multiple distinct projects, often supported by different funding streams. The overarching model was that investment in the site should be self-financing. Centurion Way was acknowledged as a particularly complex project, and Officers recognised the need to strengthen the development of business cases for similar schemes to ensure value for money.
 - Future income generation was important, but the Capital Programme had only been shared with the Authority in April, necessitating a rapid response. Should the current capital funding trend continue, the Authority would seek to have a pipeline of revenue-generating projects ready for implementation, acknowledging that such schemes required significant lead-in time. It was further noted that a three-year financial settlement would facilitate more effective forward planning.
 - Funds had been allocated for the potential acquisition of Queen Elizabeth Country Park (QECP). However, as the site was not currently available for purchase, the capital allocation was no longer required. It was noted that partnership work continued in and around the site, and that Hampshire County Council had been informed of the change.
31. **RESOLVED:** The Authority:
1. Approved the revised Capital Programme 2025/26 and additional budget requirement of £0.902m as detailed in paragraph 3.6;
 2. Delegated authority to the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Authority, to vary the Capital Programme 2025/26 and to approve project plans as necessary as required by the SDNPA's Financial Procedures;
 3. Delegated authority to the Director of Landscape and Strategy, in consultation with the Chair of the P&R Committee, to agree arrangements for the procurement of and to authorise the entering into of contracts of a value of £0.200m or greater to deliver the Capital Programme 2025/26; and

4. Noted the process for monitoring and evaluating capital projects and the reporting schedule on the delivery of the Capital Programme as set out in paragraph 5.1.

ITEM 15. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT: PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2024-25

32. The Interim Chief Finance Officer introduced, and Members considered the report (NPA25/26-06).
33. Members made the following comment:
 - Clarity was sought as to whether the underspend indicated that the Authority's budgeting process was not as robust as it ought to be.
 - Clarification was sought regarding the basis and context for the £424,000 bad debt provision.
 - Clarification was sought as to whether the scale of the loss had been anticipated, and if not, what factors had contributed to the variance.
34. Members were advised:
 - The underspend did not need require repayment and so was not considered a significant issue. Nonetheless the Authority was reviewing its budgeting processes with a view to reducing underspends in future years.
 - The bad debt provision related to staffing and associated costs arising from the decision to make South Downs Commercial Operations Limited (SDCOL) dormant and bring the operation of SSCP in-house.
 - The scale of loss was lower than the £484,000 figure reported to the October NPA meeting. A loan provision of £220,000 had been set aside for SDCOL but had been not drawn down. Bringing the operation of SSCP in-house would simplify financial reporting. The final financial position of SDCOL would take time to confirm and anything not required at the point of making the company dormant would return to the Authority in Financial Year 2025-26. The figures presented reflected the best estimate as of March 2025.
35. **RESOLVED:** The Authority:
 1. Noted the provisional revenue outturn position of a net £0.731m below budget variance for the 2024/25 financial year;
 2. Approved the revenue budget carry forward requests from 2024/25 to 2025/26 of £0.870m as set out in Appendix 2;
 3. Approved the Capital variations as detailed in Appendix 3;
 4. Approved the proposed of the below budget variance as detailed in paragraph 3.7; and
 5. Approved the release of £0.305m of funding for capital to funding for revenue to support the general reserve as set out in paragraphs 3.8-3.10.

ITEM 16. PLANNING COMMITTEE MINUTES

36. Authority Members noted the minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held on 13 March and 10 April 2025.

ITEM 17. POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES

37. Authority Members noted the minutes of the Policy & Resources Committee meeting held on 20 February 2025.

ITEM 18. APPOINTMENT, MANAGEMENT & STANDARDS COMMITTEE MINUTES

38. Authority Members noted the minutes of the Appointment, Management and Standards Committee meetings held on 19 December 2024.

ITEM 19 POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES

39. Authority Members noted the Part II minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 20 February 2025.

ITEM 20 APPOINTMENT, MANAGEMENT & STANDARDS COMMITTEE MINUTES

40. Authority Members noted the Part II minutes of the Appointment, Management and Standards Committee meeting held on 19 December 2024.
41. The Chair closed the meeting at 2.32pm.

Signed _____

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING

Held at 1.00pm on 1 September 2025 in the Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre, North Street, Midhurst, West Sussex, GU29 9DH.

Present:

Vanessa Rowlands (Chair), Heather Baker, Paul Bevan, Debbie Curnow-Ford, Joan Grech, Melanie Hunt, John Hyland, Stephen McAuliffe, Robert Mocatta, Jerry Pett, Mark Potter, Steven Ridgeon, Andrew Shaxson, Lara Sonola and Vicki Wells.

South Downs National Park Authority Officers:

Siôn McGeever (Chief Executive Officer), Laura Sercombe (Director of Landscape and Strategy), Tim Slaney (Director of Planning), James Winkworth (Director of Growth and Business Development) Janice Austin (Legal Officer), Richard Fryer (Senior Governance Officer), Robert Green (Major Planning Projects & Performance Manager), Richard Sandiford (Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer), and Victoria Turner (Head of Finance and Corporate Services).

CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

42. The Chair of the Authority welcomed all present and informed them of general housekeeping matters.

ITEM 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

43. Apologies were received from Alun Alesbury, Antonia Cox, Peter Diplock, Chris Dowling, Mark Fairweather, Gary Marsh, Daniel Stewart-Roberts and Stephen Whale.

ITEM 2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

44. The following declarations were made:

- Jerry Pett declared a public service interest in Agenda Item 7 as a Winchester City Councillor.
- Robert Mocatta declared a public service interest in Agenda Item 7 as an East Hampshire District Councillor

ITEM 3. URGENT MATTERS

45. There were no urgent matters.

ITEM 4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

46. There were no public speakers.

ITEM 5. NEED FOR PART II EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

47. Members were asked to consider the exclusion of the public, including the press, from the meeting for Agenda Item 7.
48. The Monitoring Officer outlined the reasons for the consideration of this exclusion under paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, explaining that the report contained information relating to the financial and business affairs of the Authority, and proposed that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exempt information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information. It was proposed that whilst there was a public interest in Authority proceedings relating to the delivery of its planning service, on balance this was outweighed by the need for the Authority to be able to consider matters in relation to its business and fully consider the implications of its proposed actions which would have implications for the agreements in relation to the ongoing delivery of its planning service without the disclosure of information

that could undermine its position or its ability to deliver value for money through these arrangements.

49. **RESOLVED:** That the meeting would move into private session at the appropriate point to consider Agenda Item 7 and that the public, including the press, would be excluded from the meeting at that point.

ITEM 6. APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEE

50. The Monitoring Officer and Head of Governance introduced the report (NPA25/26-07).
51. **RESOLVED:** The Authority appointed Lara Sonola to the Policy and Resources Committee.
52. The meeting was closed to the public, including the press, and moved into private session at 1.07pm.

ITEM 7. DELEGATED HOST AUTHORITY ARRANGEMENT - LEWES DISTRICT COUNCIL

53. The Major Planning Projects and Performance Manager introduced the report (NPA25/26-08).
54. Members considered the report.
55. **RESOLVED:** The Authority:
1. Agreed that, in principle, the South Downs National Park Authority enter into a new Agreement under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 with Lewes District Council to provide a quality development management service for a period of 7 months to 31 March 2026 with a three-month extension clause should both parties agree to 30 June 2026; and
 2. Delegated authority to the Director of Planning to negotiate, complete and sign the Agreement referred to in 1) above.
56. The Chair closed the meeting at 1.26pm.

Signed _____