

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**
Date **16 October 2025**
By **Authority Chair**
Title of Report **Authority Chair Update**

Note

Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to note the update from the Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report outlines the activities of the Chair and the Members of the SDNPA since the NPA meeting on the 8 July 2025.

2. Update

Member activity

2.1 There was an extraordinary NPA meeting held on the 1 September so that our new nationally appointed, SoS Member, Lara Sonola, could be appointed to P&R Committee. Welcome to the South Downs National Park Authority board Lara!

Parish Workshop

2.2 As part of our engagement with local communities within the National Park, we host 3 online meetings a year for parish councils. The autumn event took place first week of October with the six parish members: John Hyland, Steven Ridgeon, Alun Alesbury, Andrew Shaxson, Paul Bevan and I, presenting updates on activities taking place across the Park and County specific projects. All members of SLT were present to then answer questions for nearly an hour. Thanks to the comms team for another successful event.

Chair Activity

2.3 I have continued to meet with local politicians over the summer. It was great to show James Partridge, leader of Wealden Council around Seven Sisters Country Park and update him on the visitor pressures that the site was experiencing at the time and to get his support for a crossing on the A259.

2.4 Claire Kerr & I took Tom Rutland, MP for East Worthing & Shoreham, for a visit to Mill Hill nature reserve in August to talk about the work the NPA is doing in this area in partnership with Adur & Worthing council and why nature recovery is so important to his constituents and the benefits it brings to water in the area.

2.5 At the beginning of October, Elaina Whittaker-Slark and Chris Lickley from the Western ranger team and I took Danny Chambers, MP for Winchester, out to hear about the nature restoration work, and successful water vole reintroduction, on the River Meon and then to Winchester Hill to discuss chalk grassland restoration.

- 2.6 I was delighted to be part of the opening of the new section of the Centurion Way at Singleton Station alongside Simon Knight, Deputy Lieutenant of West Sussex and Ian Graham, Director of Estates & Campus services at the West Dean estate on 20 August. A huge well done to Colin Carre, Alister Linton-Crook for project managing this phase and to Emily Summers-Mileman for the wonderful interpretation on site at Singleton.
- 2.7 On 5 September, I attended the Hampshire Culture Connects event in Winchester, which saw people from the cultural community all over Hampshire come together to discuss how devolution may affect the sector, and what opportunities there are for greater collaboration. Well done to Anooshka Rawden for being part of the Culture Connects team and getting this off the ground. It was a truly inspiring event.
- 2.8 It was great to volunteer and walk with the Muslim Hikers when they visited Seven Sisters Country Park on 21 September, alongside Kevin Wright and Mark Waller-Gutierrez. Josh Esan and the comms team did a wonderful job hosting.
- 2.9 The Towner Gallery hosted a dinner on 24 September for key funding partners and stakeholders, including the Arts Council and Heritage Lottery Fund which I attended.
- 2.10 On 25 September I attended a celebration in Newhaven for the great work that's been happening this year with regeneration in the town, especially along the waterfront.

National Parks England

- 2.11 It's been a busy period for me chairing NPE. I have really focused this time on strengthening relationships with our key external partners, especially the National Landscapes Association and internally with other National Park Authorities.
- 2.12 In July I attended the National Landscapes Conference in Winchester.
- 2.13 We had a NPE visioning workshop in London in July with the full board.
- 2.14 I attended a dinner the night before a Natural England board meeting, which was focused on Protected Landscapes and how NE could better support us as we all aim to deliver on the Government's commitment to deliver 30% of the Country managed for nature by 2030.
- 2.15 In August I visited The Broads National Park as they recently rejoined the National Parks England family. The team there planned a day so that I could learn about their special qualities, current issues and their extra Navigation purpose.
- 2.16 The Protected Landscape Partnership met for its annual in-person board meeting in the Peak District in September. Around the meeting we got to see the work of the Moors for the Future partnership and the visionary work of the Landscape Observatory, which the PLP are supporting.
- 2.17 I attended the APPG for Outdoor Recreation & Access to Nature's launch of their report calling for Government to increase their support for access to nature, especially for children.
- 2.18 There was a NPE board meeting in the New Forest at the end of September.
- 2.19 I visited the Tamer Valley National Landscape on the 30 September alongside the Chair of the National Landscapes Association, Philip Hygate. Apparently, this is the first time that the two chairs of these bodies have done a visit to a Protected Landscape together. History was made!
- 2.20 I attended the Big Ideas Forum, hosted by National Park Partnerships, on 3 October as they plan their work for the year ahead.

Local Access Forum (LAF)

- 2.21 Andrew Shaxson has been attending the forum, which has really come back to life after a break during and after COVID. Thanks to some new board members, there's now a wider range of voices—including people from businesses that depend on access and disabled individuals who weren't always represented before. Meetings are happening regularly again; the last was on 19 September, and the next one's set for 1 December. They will be keeping an eye on Rights of Way maintenance, especially since local government is changing, but also recognise that 'Access' means much more than just keeping paths open.

2.22 UK National Parks Foundation

Personal news, I was made a trustee of the UK National Parks Foundation in September. It's an exciting time for the foundation as it develops into its next phase. I hope to bring a nationwide perspective to these discussions.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 I am happy to respond to any questions that may arise from this update and will provide any further updates as needed at the meeting.

VANESSA ROWLANDS

Authority Chair

South Downs National Park Authority

Contact:	Vanessa Rowlands
Tel:	01730 814810
Email:	vanessa.rowlands@southdowns.gov.uk
Appendices	None
SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive; Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer.
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	None

