

**Agenda Item 7**  
**Report NPA25/26-14**

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**  
Date **9 December 2025**  
By **Authority Chair**  
Title of Report **Authority Chair Update**

**Note**

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

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**1. Introduction**

1.1 This report outlines the activities of the Chair and the Members of the SDNPA since the NPA meeting on the 16 October 2025.

**2. Update**

Member activity

2.1 To follow is a list of activities that I, and members of the SDNPA board, have taken part in on behalf of the NPA.

2.2 I want to draw attention to one event, in particular, that I attended on 27 November: the **National Emergency Briefing**.

2.3 This purpose of the event was to reset the national conversation relating to climate change & the nature crisis and to make sure MPs, other parliamentarians and influencers are fully informed on the threats to the Country from the increase in global warming, now that the goal of keeping global warming at 1.5 °C has passed.

2.4 We heard from 10 leading scientists and other experts on issues such as Nature, Climate, Weather Extremes, Food Security, Economics, Energy Transition, Health and National Security. The event was chaired by Mike Berners-Lee, who runs Small World Consulting, (the company that National Parks have worked with to get our carbon baselines) and was opened by Chris Packman in a typically rousing speech.

2.5 There is no doubting that we are in a real emergency and action needs to be accelerated across the Country, and the economy, at a 'Marshall plan' scale. One of the main blocks, right now, is the lack of any meaningful conversation at a National Level within politics and out in the wider public. I feel National Parks can make a positive contribution here as we deliver our partnership management plans. We have wonderful links to multiple communities as well as our outreach work in school and voluntary groups.

2.6 The impact that our extreme weather patterns are causing now such as droughts, due to record hot & dry summers, and flooding from heavy rainfall, due to warmer, wetter winters can't be ignored. We will need to adapt, and perhaps direct, changes in the landscape to manage water more efficiently and these changes will need to be explained. Great storytelling

- 2.7 I urge you to visit the website <https://www.nebriefing.org> where there are links to the speeches made by the experts.

Member Activity

- 2.8 Daniel Stewart-Roberts and I attended the **Lewes Masterplan** event hosted by Lewes Town Council on 22 October. The event brought together interested parties from across Lewes and public bodies such as SDNPA, ESCC Active Travel, Friends of Lewes and Charleston Trust in order to understand what the needs from the town community are for future development and travel plans.
- 2.9 Paul Bevan attended the **Symposium on the River Ouse Charter** that was held on 22 October in Newhaven. The day was run by Love Our Ouse, The Environmental Law Foundation and Moral Imagination. It gathered stakeholders and activists to discuss how the Ouse Charter could be practically implemented, addressing questions such as under what circumstances and how best to give an effective voice to the river.
- 2.10 The **Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) Operations Advisory Board** met on 22 October and was attended by Mark Potter. They reviewed the impressive work from the 'peak' season and planning for holiday cottage and car park improvements.
- 2.11 **Local Plan workshop** took place on the 23 October. Thank you to all members who attended and to the officers from the planning policy team for clear and thorough presentations on any policy changes.
- 2.12 Mark Potter attended the **Transport for South East (TfSE) partnership board** in London on 27 October. Discussed was the newly drafted transport strategy for the South East, including working to support the government's ambition to boost rail freight by 70%, and the potential impacts of proposed improvements on protected landscapes.
- 2.13 Mark Fairweather and I attended the **Lewes Flood Day** event on Friday 31 October. The day was a chance to reflect on the devastating floods from 2000 and 25 years on, what was learnt and how will we manage the increase in water and flood threat into the future. Nature was front & centre in how we mitigate and adapt to dryer summers and wetter winters.
- 2.14 The SDNPA team hosted an **Induction Day** for new members on 11 November. Lara Sonola, Cameron MacDonald and I were taken to Harting Down to learn about how the geology and water flows across millennia have influenced farming and land management and in turns settlement patterns and biodiversity. This was followed by a session on governance for the NPA and wider National Parks family.
- 2.15 As part of the Downs to the Sea project, SDNPA has been working with a group of writers and poets through our partners Writing Our Legacy on a piece of work called **Species Stories**. Lara Sonola and I attended a reading and celebration of these works on 15 November. The writers spoke of what drew them to their chosen species, either Bats, Butterflies, Bees or Birds, and how they went about producing their work. These will feed into the school outreach programme that SDNPA are running

Chair Activity

- 2.16 I attended the Wonderseekers annual celebration of children, science and community action at the **Winchester Science Centre** on Thursday 23 October. It was inspirational to hear about their ambition to restore the chalk grassland immediately surrounding the centre and how they have been engaging with the school children in the Hampshire area with this project.
- 2.17 I will be extending visits to all the candidates standing in next May's elections for both the **Hampshire and Sussex & Brighton Mayoralities**. This month I have taken both Katy Bourne (Conservative, Sussex) and Donna Jones (Conservative, Hampshire) out to show them how we work with nature in our planning function and the meaning of landscape led. Also, how we are leveraging private finance into the National Park and impact that this innovation is having on the economy. Thank you to all the officers who have helped with their time on these visits.

- 2.18 I attended the **National Park Partnerships AGM** on 5 November.
- 2.19 The **Sussex Heritage Trust** recently won three years' worth of funding from the National Heritage Lottery to support their **Heritage Skills taster days**. SDNPA helped by supporting two pilots in recent years, so I was delighted to attend a taster day at the Weald & Downland Museum on 12 November. The event had construction students from three colleges, Crawley, Chichester and Brighton MET, trying out four conservation heritage skills such as wattle & daubing, woodcraft and brick making.
- 2.20 On 21 November I attended the second meeting of the **Informal Partnership board** for Sussex & Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority.
- 2.21 I attended the **National Parks UK forum** meeting on 3 December, which is a meeting of all the Chairs and CEOs of the 15 UK National Parks. We received updates on the work that's happening nationally on climate and nature as well as an update on the UK comms unit.
- National Parks England
- 2.22 As Chair of NPE, I chaired an in-person board meeting on 20 October.
- 2.23 I attended the first meeting of the **APPG for National Parks and National Landscapes** on 21 October. Encouraging attendance by MPs but it would be good to see more from the South Downs!
- 2.24 In October I visited Exmoor NPA on an information gathering visit.
- 2.25 As a member of the **Protected Landscapes Partnership** board, I was part of the panel that interviewed for the new Independent Chair of the PLP. We now wait for Minister Mary Creagh to choose from the appointable candidates.
- 2.26 I attended the **National Emergency Briefing** in Westminster on 27 November <https://www.nebriefing.org>.
- 2.27 We have a board meeting on 11 December.
- 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**

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Appendices	None
SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive; Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer.
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	None

