

Report to	South Downs National Park Authority
Date	11 July 2017
By	Chief Executive Officer
Title of Report	Chief Executive's Progress Report

Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to note the progress made by the South Downs National Park Authority (the Authority) since the last report

1. Summary and Background

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the work that has been underway since my last report to the 30 March 2017 NPA.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The **new Ministerial teams** were announced soon after the election, with Michael Gove as the new Secretary of State at Defra. This will increase the profile and political clout of our sponsor Department as the Brexit negotiations begin. The new Secretary of State has made a number of clear statements on the importance of protecting the environment and raising standards. On the BBC Radio 4 Today Programme on 19 June, for instance, he stated that "getting out of CAP means that we can ensure that our farmers are better protected than ever before. We can also ensure that we have higher environmental and animal welfare standards." It is also welcome news that the Department has re-stated its intention to produce a 25 year plan for the environment, although we have had no indication as yet of the likely timetable.
- 2.2 There were no other changes to the Ministerial team at Defra, which means that Lord Gardiner will continue as Minister responsible for National Parks and George Eustice for agriculture. Lord Gardiner has confirmed that he remains committed to addressing our conference for the 15 UK National Parks at the end of October.
- 2.3 Two National Park MPs have Ministerial posts - Steve Brine, the MP for Winchester, is a Minister in the Department of Health with a brief that covers the public health and prevention portfolio and Damian Hinds, the MP for East Hampshire, retains his post as Minister of State at Employment. Margaret has written to all 13 National Park MPs to congratulate them on their election and we will follow this up with targeted meetings and invitations. We will, for instance, be inviting Steve Brine to address our health and wellbeing conference on 11 October.
- 2.4 Before Purdah, NPE submitted a paper on the **Future of Farming** in the English National Parks, based on the work of a group which included an SDNPA member. This paper sets out the fundamental importance of sustainable agriculture to Protected Landscapes, some broad ideas for how any new scheme could be designed, and an offer to Government for NPAs to pilot new approaches. The NPE paper was acknowledged by Defra but given the General Election and other events it may be a while before we see a response. In the meantime the **Queen's Speech** includes a commitment to legislation to enable the UK Government to make agricultural support payments once we leave the EU Common Agricultural Policy, which is especially important as Ministers have guaranteed the existing level of payments until 2025 (an increase over the date of 2022 pledged at the election). There was, however, no specific mention of an Environment Bill.

- 2.5 Here in the South Downs, in parallel with the NPE approach, we have held three **farm cluster workshops** (at Sullington, Meonstoke and Plumpton) to consider the future of farming in the South Downs post the UK's withdrawal from the EU. All three events followed the same format and had two aims:
- To identify the strategic priorities with regard to the future of farming in the National Park subsequent to the UK exiting the EU.
 - To consider the opportunities for piloting options for a new agri-environment scheme, once the current system is no longer relevant.
- 2.6 All were well received by the many farmers who attended. This is a complex subject but one which will have a significant impact on the landscape of the National Park and as such it is a high priority for the SDNPA. Next steps are to pull the findings from all three workshops together and develop potential options (with a smaller farmer working group) for piloting a new scheme which can then be presented to Defra.
- 2.7 On 30 March members approved the registration of a new independent charitable trust – **The South Downs National Park Trust**. June saw the first official meeting of the Trustees, where all of the necessary governance arrangements were approved and there was a robust and positive discussion of the proposed fundraising strategy. We will now register with the Charity Commission, subsequent to the establishment of the Trust's banking arrangements. There is no guarantee how long the Commission will take to process our submission, but the average is 6 weeks. We therefore remain confident that we will be in a position to launch by the end of the summer.
- 2.8 Whilst we wait for this process to complete, the Income Generation and Marketing Team are busy preparing the website to incorporate the new Trust pages, donation function and shop, as well as developing a number of new partnerships which will sit with the Trust after launch. An example is a new relationship with Langham's, which will see 5p from each of their bottles of beer sold going to the Trust, as well as the incorporation of the shared identity into their branding.
- 3. Planning**
- 3.1 The Authority's **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** launched on 1st April. We are expecting our first CIL payment imminently and the Major Projects team are drawing up a detailed business plan to establish on how projects will be evaluated for funding and which projects ought to be prioritised. This will build upon the Infrastructure Delivery Plan that was submitted in 2016 as part of the Planning Inspectorate's examination of our CIL Charging Schedule.
- 3.2 In terms of **Planning Performance** the fourth quarter's figures (January to March) show that of the 580 cases across the Authority 93% were dealt with within statutory timescales (3 percentage points higher than the third quarter). All 'major', 'minor' and 'other' category targets were met, both for the fourth quarter and for the financial year.
- 3.3 Just 10% of appeals were allowed in the fourth quarter of 2016/17, a marked improvement on the 43% allowed in the second and third quarters. I remain conscious, however, that performance in relation to appeals requires close attention and a thorough analysis is being undertaken of all appeal decisions issued across the National Park from April 2012 to the end of June 2017.
- 3.4 To date, 18 Estates have engaged in the **Whole Estate Plan (WEP)** process, of which 6 have submitted first stage draft Plans. The WEP prepared by Wiston Estate will be the first to be considered by Committee on 20 July 2017. The report is currently being drafted and the Plan itself will be made public along with the report in July. Officers are expecting at least another two WEPs to be put forward for consideration in 2017. There have also been positive discussions with several of Local Authorities that own land within the Park, regarding the potential for them to produce a WEP and the level of support we could provide to those wishing to do so.

4. Progress of Existing Projects

- 4.1 The new stepped / ramped access from the **Centurion Way** path to Motor Road at West Dean providing connectivity to the village and its amenities is now open and proving extremely popular. Survey and design work for the next stage of the Centurion Way – the 6 km section from West Dean to the South Downs Way – is underway. Currently, this primarily comprises ecological and topographical surveys. Submission of a planning application for this project has been scheduled for January 2018.
- 4.2 There have been delays with drawing up the legal documentation between BHCC and Plumpton College, which is required to start the **Parks for People project, at Stanmer**. This may mean the end date being moved back 6 months. In the meantime BHCC will be undertaking basic clearance works to fulfil the pre-commencement conditions.
- 4.3 A 10 year Masterplan for the whole of Stanmer Park is an HLF condition of grant. We have proposed that this should use the template and methodology of a Whole Estate Plan under SDNPA guidance. As agreed by Members, the SDNPA has confirmed a contribution of £360k, in return for a stake in the assets, details to be negotiated. At a recent meeting with senior officers and BHCC we discussed the possibility of limited enabling development to enhance the surroundings of the Stanmer village and unlock investment in the Long Barn, and BHCC are currently preparing a detailed proposal.

5. Volunteers and Delivery

- 5.1 Since my last report **volunteers** have carried out 194 practical, promotional and training tasks with 1047 days of volunteer support overall. Another VRS introductory training day was successfully completed in May, with a further 14 volunteer rangers trained.
- 5.2 This year's Water Vole cycle has now begun with mink raft checks and the latest round of water vole releases. Pupils from 4 local schools including Inwoods Small School, Droxford Junior School, West Meon School and Great Ballard School joined volunteers and staff for the release programme.
- 5.3 A major programme of work has been undertaken on access land, with 15 surveys, 6 of which were on the South Downs Way. Additionally, 25 tasks have been carried out on the SDW, of which 19 have been general SDW maintenance and upkeep of the route including a gate installation at the Long Man, habitat enhancement at Truleigh Hill and pond repairs at America Barn in Beddingham.

6. Corporate Update

- 6.1 **The Annual Review**, which highlights our key achievements for 2016/17 linked to the objectives in our 2016-21 Corporate Plan, will be available online from the end of June. Copies will be available at the meeting.
- 6.2 Work is well under way with the first **review of the Partnership Management Plan (PMP)**. Published in 2014, this was the first shared plan for the National Park, based on two years of in-depth engagement with communities, businesses, NGOs, and statutory agencies. The timetable and process for the review was endorsed by the NPA and the South Downs Partnership in late 2016. It was agreed that there should be a light touch look at outcomes and policies, using case studies to celebrate progress, with the main focus on renewing the delivery framework to establish clear priorities for the five years 2019-24. Its purpose is:
- To get our partners more deeply engaged, locking in more commitments to the PMP in their own business plan;
 - To set SDNPA priorities over the next five years;
 - To bring Members, staff and volunteers who joined since the PMP was created fully up to speed so they can be champions and advocates;
 - To maximise the synergy between the Local Plan and the PMP;
 - To work with all our partners to collectively raise the profile of the whole National Park and bring the PMP alive.

- 6.3 We have split the PMP into eight subject areas, each the responsibility of a strategy lead. For each subject area we are:
- articulating a clear aim and objectives for the next five years;
 - identifying projects we know are priorities at the start of period;
 - setting out clear criteria for deciding on future project bids.
- 6.4 The work will come together to form a refreshed Delivery Framework for the period 2019-24 which will drive the SDNPA Corporate Plan and a “project shelf” for the fundraising work of the Trust. We are involving a range of partners who will be asked to identify the contribution their own strategic plans will make, and the next series of Parish Workshops, in October, will feature the PMP review. The work on each subject area will progress through meetings of the South Downs Partnership, Member workshops, the new Policy & Resources Committee and of course the NPA itself.
- 6.5 At the staff event on 3 May we launched a new e-learning system called **ELMS**. This ensures that all staff have easy access to the right training and information to enable them to deliver the best for the National Park. With over 80 staff completing data protection training, the system is already proving its worth. It has developed into an SDNPA-led national project since 10 NPAs have committed to using the system and we are optimistic that the others will join in time. The next stage is to develop ELMS into an information hub to improve sharing of information internally and across all NPAs.
- 6.6 Work is underway to develop courses that will be of interest to Members and officers, a priority being the development of “a day in the life of ...” so that Members and officers can better understand each other’s roles. The system will be launched to Members by the end of the year.
- 6.7 We are investigating the opportunities open to SDNPA through an **apprenticeship scheme** based on best practice in other National Parks. Work is progressing in identifying opportunities with local colleges to recruit young people onto the programme and provide the academic curriculum. Both Chichester College and Sparsholt have been approached with regard to the Ranger role and we will be meeting with Plumpton College in the near future. We are also working with Chichester College, who have a renowned and comprehensive Planning Apprenticeship and we hope to recruit to this role over the next few weeks.
- 6.8 A small working group has been set up to look at the longer term programme so that we are able to offer a comprehensive package to apprentices, particularly in the countryside/ranger areas which will encompass skills unique to our local area. There may be a possibility to secure some funding from the Foyle Foundation.
- 6.9 **The National Parks UK Conference**, which SDNPA is hosting, will run from lunchtime on Wednesday 25 October until lunchtime on the 27th and will be based at the Goodwood Conference Centre, with the AGM of National Parks UK taking place on the morning of 25 October at the South Downs Centre.
- 6.10 Following registration, lunch and welcome speeches on Wednesday, delegates will be taken to experience the South Downs landscape with tours of the Goodwood Estate and farm and a site visit to the Centurion Way. The evening will be an informal networking event at the Weald and Downland Living Museum, to which all Members can apply for a place to attend, with talks from Frank Dean of Yosemite National Park, and our own Dan Oakley.
- 6.11 Thursday will consist of whole day site tours to the West and to the East of the National Park, each mirroring the other in content, taking in visits to viewpoints, vineyards, farm clusters, planning issues, volunteering and outreach projects with a view to underpinning the debate on Friday morning on the Conference theme ‘National Parks for the Future’. On Thursday evening the formal dinner in Goodwood House will feature a South Downs Menu with drinks sponsored by Upperton and Ridgeview Vineyards, whose owners have been invited to present their wines, with after dinner speeches by Defra Under Secretary of State, Lord Gardiner, and BBC Coast presenter and author Nicholas Crane.

- 6.12 On Friday morning the main debate on the Conference theme will take place, to which all Members can apply for a place to attend, starting with presentations from each of our speakers. Confirmed speakers to date are Professor Ian Bateman from the Natural Capital Committee, Adam Philip Phillips from CNP Youth Mosaic Project and William Wolmer, of the South Downs Land Management Group. Following a panel debate the morning will end with the presentation of the National Park Awards, sponsored by Ridgeview Vineyard.
- 6.13 We received 21 submissions for poster and platform presentations at the **South Downs Research Conference** on 6 July which exceeded all previous years. We have now chosen 7 presentations and hope to have a good showing of 10+ posters. Themes are mixed, ranging from bats to burrows, and represent many of our special qualities. We have already had over 80 bookings, which is our upper limit. There will be two key note speakers:
- Dr Ruth Feber from WildCRU at the University of Oxford will be discussing the efficacy and application of agri-environment schemes.
 - Professor Brett Day from the University of Exeter will be discussing the modelling of ecosystems services.
- 6.14 We have attracted £5,000 of sponsorship from Coast to Capital LEP which will be used to support the conference in this and the following year.
- 6.15 **The South Downs National Park Citizens Panel** will enable us to engage directly with residents on issues of key importance in the South Downs National Park. Our plan is to undertake two full panel surveys a year – one in October and one in April – and one or two smaller surveys of select panel members (e.g. people who live in a particular postcode area, people of a specific age etc) for more targeted research. We also expect to undertake at least one set of focus groups each year. It will run for an initial pilot period of three years.
- 6.16 Other National Parks have utilised the Citizens Panels of neighbouring local authorities or undertaken one-off resident's surveys. This builds on their experience, extending it to produce a larger and more consistent long-term evidence base.
- 6.17 The Panel will enable us to engage with people who have not previously connected with the National Park and/or the work of the SDNPA. There are a number of different ways we plan to use the Panel, for example: testing leaflets and campaigns prior to release, sense checking our ideas for income generation and providing feedback on their levels of awareness of the work of the Authority or the shared identity. Our ultimate goal is to utilise the panel to measure changes in attitudes, awareness and behaviours over time.
- 7. Lessons from other NPAs**
- 7.1 The NPUK Educators/Outreach Officers group are currently working on sharing best practice around **youth engagement** and youth forums. The work is being led by the Peak District who have spoken to colleagues across the NPUK family to identify the range of mechanisms we currently employ to do this and their relative effectiveness.
- 7.2 We have been talking with colleagues in other National Parks about their **guided walks programmes** with particular reference to Health Walks. This is proving useful as we develop the Active Access programme with ESCC and the Heathlands Reunited programme.
- 7.3 Most guided walk leaders are volunteers recruited specifically for the role and trained accordingly – this could be for Health Walks, as in the Cairngorms who support more than 30 health walk groups across the National Park, or for more challenging walks as in the Lake District who recruit and train around 90 volunteer leaders who lead around 250 walks or public events annually.
- 7.4 **The Peak District NPA** charge for pre-app tree advice (£60 per app) which means it receives better applications, as well as generating revenue to support 3 woodland officers. We are considering a similar model for SDNPA.

7.5 SDNPA has made a further contribution of £10k to **National Park Partnerships** as previously agreed, to enable it to continue funding the running costs of the organisation as it starts delivering benefits to NPAs. The first of those will be the deal with Columbia Clothing on uniforms and clothing for National Park staff, members and volunteers, which has now been signed by all NPAs. The SDNPA clothing allocation has been agreed and delivery is expected in October.

8. Media and Communications

8.1 The theme of this year's **National Parks Week**, which runs from 24 July to 31 July, is "Bringing People Together". We will be taking the National Park out into our urban fringe – with four events held in urban locations – Moulscroomb in Brighton, Littlehampton, Haslemere and Borden. Children will take part in activities and our rangers will be on hand to answer questions and share local tips on getting out into the National Park and spotting wildlife over the school holidays.

8.2 This has been a busy time for our **media** work with some highlights including the Sunday Telegraph naming the National Park as a 'walker's treasure trove', Katy and Bruce being interviewed on BBC Sussex about Heathlands Reunited and the Serpent Trail walk and my dash across London to be interviewed on the future of farming on BBC South Today.

8.3 The **E-newsletter** has reached a total of 2,363 total subscribers and we are looking to grow this by at least another 1000 in the coming year.

8.4 We are currently preparing a **Public Affairs Strategy** and an updated Communications & Engagement Strategy. It will be discussed at the Member day on 6 September, P&R Committee on 19 September and, all going well, will be brought to the NPA on 19 October.

8.5 The Planning Committee approved applications for **18 entry signs** on 15 June. The sign for the South Downs Centre and a revised sign for Clanfield will be submitted in the next two months. Work on the formal EU tender for the production and installation of the signs has begun and our aim is to have a number up in time for the October Conference, EU tender timescales, permitting.

9. Conclusion

9.1 As with previous reports, my aim has been to provide an overview of the highlights of the period since my report to the 30 March 2017 NPA, leaving Members to follow up any issues on which they would like more detail or which they would like to discuss further at the Meeting.

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Appendices	None
SDNPA Consultees	Director of Countryside Policy & Management; Director of Planning
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	N/A