

**Agenda Item 9**  
**Report NPA19/17**

Report to	<b>South Downs National Park Authority</b>
Date	<b>19 October 2017</b>
By	<b>Chief Executive Officer</b>
Title of Report	<b>Chief Executive's Progress Report</b>

**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 11 July 2017 NPA.

**2. Introduction**

- 2.1 Since my last report, work has continued on the Future of Farming. At national level, the National Parks England (NPE) group will be meeting Defra officials on 6 November and this will be followed on 13 November by a round table between National Park Chairs/CEOs and the Secretary of State Michael Gove. At a recent officer group brought together by NPE it was clear that, like us, a number of National Parks are now thinking about proposing pilots to test ideas for a new agriculture support scheme.
- 2.2 Following the success of the farm cluster workshops, we are working with our consultant to put together our own proposal to Defra for a pilot. An exploratory letter to the Minister emphasises the importance of farming and forestry to the landscape of the South Downs and describes its unique position amongst National Parks in having lowland agriculture and a large number of people close by who directly benefit from the services our landscape provides – such as clean water, pollination, carbon storage and improved health.
- 2.3 Officials from Defra and Natural England (NE) continue to be encouraging about the future role of NPAs in agriculture policy. We have discussed with NE the idea of sharing the costs of a post to support farm clusters, develop the pilot and provide extra support for South Downs farmers considering joining the new “mid-tier” scheme. Meetings have also been held with the South Downs Land Management Group, the NFU and the CLA. Our intention is that any final pitch to Ministers should be led by a group of South Downs farmers, with the SDNPA and other bodies in support.

**3 Planning**

- 3.1 The first two **Whole Estate Plans (WEPs)** have been endorsed by the Policy & Resources Committee. The WEP for Wiston Estate was endorsed on 20 July. This is a large estate with a strong vision for the future which encompasses landscape, biodiversity and community/social issues alongside aspirations for further diversification and reuse of redundant agricultural buildings. On 19 September the WEP for Newton Valance Estate was also endorsed. This is a smaller concern near Selborne which has arable, pasture for its equestrian business and other diversification activities such as holiday accommodation and shooting. The Iford Estate in the Ouse Valley south of Lewes is one of the next WEPs in the pipeline, and both Brighton & Hove CC and Eastbourne BC have now

declared their intention to do the same for their downland property, which is welcome news.

- 3.2 The level of interest now being shown in WEPs is very encouraging, although it gives the SDNPA some capacity issues in giving informed feedback and advice in the drafting process, so we are investigating ways of resourcing this in a flexible manner that does not result in permanent increases in headcount.
- 3.3 A Communications Plan for the **Local Plan** Pre-Submission consultation was developed with clear key messages and a range of activities to maximise promotion of and engagement with the consultation. This includes the 3 National Park Authority workshops, one per county, for interested parish and District Councillors, which have now taken place as well as one-to-one meetings with key partners and statutory bodies. A Press release was issued to launch the consultation which will be followed up by reminder releases at the half way and near end points. This is supported by posters, displays in deposit locations, a web story promotion of the Local Plan video, ads in local papers, and extensive social media coverage.
- 3.4 Copies of the Plan are available at key deposit points and data sticks have been sent to each Town/Parish council. The consultation runs until 21 November. We are seeking the widest possible range of responses, both positive and negative to ensure that the Inspector has a balanced view of how it is considered locally. It would therefore be most helpful if Members could encourage their authorities, parishes and partners to put forward responses.

#### **4. Progress of Existing Projects**

- 4.1 The first **South Downs Forestry Champions Group** was held on 20 September. Our woods face a host of challenges, such as an ever increasing array of pests and diseases and the impacts of climate change. There is, however, also a major opportunity in the form of new markets and technologies for timber products, such as timber based construction systems and pre-fabricated housing. Health and Wellbeing and forest recreation also present opportunities and challenges for the South Downs' woods. The South Downs Forestry Champions Group is therefore designed to act as an executive group to champion sustainable forestry in the National Park, providing leadership and direction to the wider Forestry Network.
- 4.2 The champions highlighted three key areas:-
- Construction – utilising South Downs timber for South Downs buildings using modern technology;
  - Communication – telling people the story of woodland, its culture and its intrinsically rich natural capital;
  - Connectivity – skills, technology and apprenticeships.

We have work in hand in all these areas.

- 4.3 **Rampion Construction Monitoring:** The cable route construction is now complete and circuit testing may be complete this week. All 116 Turbines have been installed and work is now focused on the offshore circuits. All signs are that the project will start generating electricity early in the New Year.
- 4.4 Work on the re-instatement of the cable route in the National Park has not, however, progressed as planned this summer and Rampion have confirmed it will not be completed this year. At present work is continuing to reinstate some sections while the majority of the route is being prepared for winter. The reason for this delay is unclear and clarification is being sought.
- 4.5 We have a number of concerns about the schedule for the re-instatement of the ground and the impact of a further winter on the exposed soil banks and cable route. We have therefore arranged a meeting with Rampion, their contractors and WSCC to address these issues.

- 4.6 The Rampion (Section 106) mitigation fund has awarded £29k of the £242,500 available to the Truleigh Hill habitat and access improvements project at the YHA centre. The project aims to enhance the YHA site and create a small educational wildlife reserve showcasing the variety of habitats found on the South Downs. A further £95k has been allocated to four other projects. The fund is open for 10 years but we aim to allocate it on a shorter timeline than this.

## 5. **Volunteers and Delivery**

- 5.1 During July, August and September, members of the Volunteer Ranger Service (VRS) carried out 263 practical, promotional and training tasks. At the time of writing, information on 222 of these was confirmed, giving a provisional total of 1102 days of volunteer support. It is estimated that this total will rise to approximately 1270 overall.
- 5.2 Work continued on the survey of Access Land, with six tasks spent identifying necessary work and six more carrying out improvement work identified through these and earlier surveys.
- 5.3 A week of flintwalling tasks, part of the on-going restoration of the Stanmer Estate boundary wall, was carried out during September and a series of tasks were held during July and August pulling Himalayan Balsam to protect river banks, mostly on tributaries of the River Rother.
- 5.4 The VRS Committee and Volunteering Team have been working together to prepare a 'Satisfaction' survey of members of the VRS, to follow similar surveys carried out five and ten years ago. It is anticipated that the survey will go out to the VRS during October.

## 6. **Corporate Update**

- 6.1 The review of the Partnership Management Plan is a major focus for the CPM Directorate, with the future direction of two of the eight issues – Walking & Cycling, Landscape & Biodiversity – having been discussed at the Policy & Resources Committee. Work on Economy, Tourism, Cultural Heritage is ongoing. A big challenge will be the process of integrating the material from all eight parts of the review to create a single Delivery Plan for 2019-24 which captures strong commitments from key partners and sets clear priorities for the SDNPA. To this end later on today's agenda the NPA will be asked to approve the creation of a Member Task & Finish Group which will feed into both the P&R Committee and the NPA. If agreed, this will provide a strategic overview and work closely with officers following the successful model of the Local Plan Member Working Group.
- 6.2 Preparations are now nearly complete for the **NPUK Conference**, which is being hosted by the SDNP from lunchtime on Wednesday 25 October to lunchtime on 27 October and is based at the Goodwood hotel and Conference Centre. All 15 UK National Parks are sending at least four delegates, with additional places going to key partners including Defra, DCLG and the wider National Park family. Other interested groups who have purchased places to attend include protected landscapes aspiring to be the National Parks of the future.
- 6.3 The theme of the conference is 'National Parks for the Future' and we have planned site visits on Wednesday afternoon and all day Thursday to showcase many aspects of our National Park which will be important to the main seminar session on Friday morning, when additional delegates from the larger NGOs will be joining in the debate. The final session will be the presentation of the National Park Hero Awards, which will be collected by the CEO of each National Park. Our own hero is Thomas Moore, Head Teacher of Bury CE Primary School, for his unstinting enthusiasm for connecting his pupils to the natural environment. Thomas Moore will collect his award at the next meeting of the NPA.
- 6.4 The site visits will encompass farm cluster groups, partnership projects, volunteer working parties, multiuser access routes, strategic planning sites, vineyards and viewpoints. South Downs food and drink will feature strongly throughout the conference and all menus served will be centred around local produce.
- 6.5 We have laid on speakers to develop a clear message about the potential of National Parks and the challenges of the next year. The list includes Frank Dean of Yosemite National Park,

Nicholas Crane, BBC 'Coast' presenter, Julia Bradbury BBC presenter, Professor Ian Bateman of the Natural Capital Committee, Dr William Wolmer, Chair of the SDLMG, Dr Sarah Mukherjee, formerly BBC Environment Correspondent, and Adam Philip Phillips of the Mosaic Youth Engagement project.

- 6.6 SDNPA officers will be involved in all aspects of delivering the conference, and the presentations and debate on Friday will be filmed and placed on our website the week after the conference.
- 6.7 At the beginning of this month we received the news that the **South Downs National Park Trust** had been registered. The Charity Commission processed our application quickly and were satisfied with the governance arrangements that had been put forward. This reflects great credit to the work of officers, members and the new Trustees, who have developed a robust series of arrangements between the Authority and the Trust.
- 6.8 The Income Generation and Marketing team are now making the final arrangements and we will be launching the Trust imminently. This will be followed by announcements about our partnership with Langham Brewery and the upcoming "Mend our Way" appeal, which seeks to raise an ambitious £120k for improvements on the South Downs Way. This appeal forms part of the national "Mend our Mountains" campaign, led by the British Mountaineering Access Conservation Trust and featuring Trails from the UK's 15 National Parks.
- 6.9 The Trust held its second meeting on 7 September before which I met with the Chair, Julie Fawcett. She expressed the Trustee's desire to work "hand in hand" with the Authority. As part of this approach they have adopted the 2050 National Park Vision. This is extremely positive and I look forward to a collaborative and productive partnership with the Trust over the coming years.
- 6.10 At the time of writing, the **Health and Wellbeing Conference** is yet to take place. This is the subject of the pre-NPA Meeting.

## **7 Apprenticeship Scheme Update**

- 7.1 The SDNPA is developing a comprehensive apprenticeship scheme with the aim of recruit young people primarily from the 16 - 20 year old age range giving them the opportunity to gain skills and qualifications related to the work of the National Park.
- 7.2 We appointed an apprentice in September and he is studying for a Level 3 Apprenticeship in Planning at Chichester College in conjunction with a full work placement programme across 4 areas of our planning directorate.
- 7.3 We plan to recruit another 4 apprentices to undertake a Countryside Worker Apprenticeship in autumn 2018 to be placed with the ranger teams. We also intend to offer opportunities for another 2 apprentices to undertake administrative or marketing apprenticeships linked to relevant work areas at that time.
- 7.4 We are planning on working closely with our local schools and encourage young people who want to look at practical methods of further education to consider our apprenticeship opportunities.

## **8. Media and Communications**

- 8.1 We invited BBC South Today to join us as we celebrated the end of the SDNPA's project to return water voles to the river Meon and Elaina also gave two interviews to BBC Solent. We generated good coverage for the SDNPA's endorsement of Wiston's Whole Estate Plan across local papers in West Sussex and planning publications and worked closely with NPE on the press launch of the joint accord with Public Health England. Wide publicity was achieved for the launch of the final consultation on the South Downs Local Plan. We responded to a short film by a bottled water company which gave misleading information about the Rampion wind farm cabling route and were able to feature a quote about our work to monitor and mitigate in the Sunday Telegraph, Times and Daily Mail. On 3 October we hosted the BBC Radio Sussex & Surrey tour bus at the South Downs Centre who, as a result, ran five interviews covering our work over the

course of the day.

- 8.2 **Social media:** At the end of July we exceeded 2000 followers on Instagram. Our main @SDNPA Twitter account now has 9528 followers and Facebook has 6579 likes. We continue to work hard to extend the reach of our social media.
- 8.3 The first edition of the **e-newsletter** went out in January 2017 and over nine months the total number of people receiving it has grown more than 50%. The September 17 newsletter went out to 2,654 people. The professional bodies suggest a successful electronic newsletter achieves around 30% “opens” and 5% clicks on links. Our September issue was opened by 42% with 16% clicking through to read more on our website.
- 8.4 We are continuing to grow the mailing list, encouraging people to sign up at shows and events, through email signatures, highlighted in weekly planning lists, offering prizes for signing-up and encouraging staff to share with people. I would be grateful if Members could do the same for their own networks.
- 8.5 The **Public Affairs Strategy** and updated **Communications & Engagement Strategy** continue to be progressed and were discussed at SMT/Committee Chairs on 3 October. After further work based on feedback from this meeting, the strategies will now go on to P&R Committee on 21 November before coming to the full NPA on 19 December. This first Public Affairs Strategy for the National Park Authority will enable us to focus our public affairs efforts on a number of key issues and to maximise our impact on policy development and practice, at a time when there have never been more opportunities for our voice to be heard across central government.
- 8.6 We have been working to ensure the inclusion of the South Downs in planned media work on the **Columbia** partnership with the Guardian. In September we appeared in two online features: “Eight landscapes you won’t believe are in Britain” which featured an image of the Cuckmere and “The Ultimate all-weather kit for enjoying the outdoors”. On 7 October we will feature in a print article on “10 ways to explore Britain’s National Parks” and in November we will feature in a print article on Dark Skies.
- 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 11 July 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; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services, Business Service Manager
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	None

