

South Downs National Park Authority

Public Affairs Strategy 2017–19

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1 Executive summary

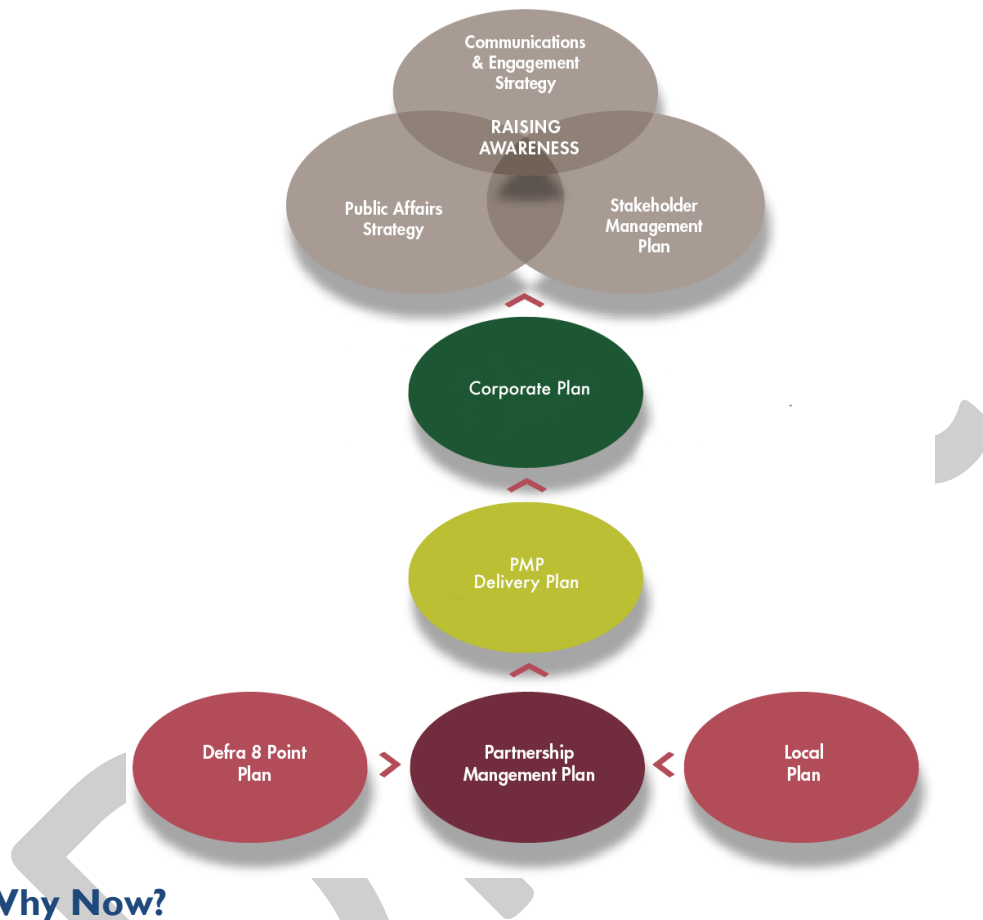
- I.1 The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) must make decisions about when and where we need to act in order to fulfill our statutory purposes and duty, and to protect the special qualities of the National Park.
- I.2 This Public Affairs Strategy is designed to enable the Authority to influence policy and decision making on agreed strategic issues affecting the National Park, in a joined up and focused manner.
- I.3 This first Public Affairs Strategy for the SDNPA has three key purposes:
- To set in motion a coordinated approach to our public affairs work
 - To agree guiding principles for how we can effectively and quickly deal with emerging issues
 - To identify the top (up to three) issues key issues that we will proactively work on over the next 18 months. This 'Action Plan' part of the strategy is designed to be reviewed every 18 months.
- I.4 A number of issues on which we could potentially focus our public affairs work over the coming 12–18 months have been identified. (These will be narrowed down to no more than three from the following list by Members):
- The Future of Farming
 - Water
 - Affordable Homes
 - Sustainable Tourism
 - Health & Wellbeing
- I.5 In addition, we will keep a watching brief on a further issue and will respond is and when necessary in a reactive manner:
- Land sales/acquisitions that meet the guiding principles
- I.6 In Section 6, we set out an **Action Plan** detailing the objectives, key stakeholders and actions that will be undertaken during 2017–18 on the three chosen priority areas
- I.7 Stakeholder management is key to our ability to influence policy, practice and opinion. The strategy identifies key stakeholders for each of the issues and how we will communicate with them, and will work alongside a Stakeholder Management Plan that sets out how we will manage our overall stakeholder relationships (see Appendix 2).

2 Background

- 2.1 This Public Affairs Strategy stems directly from the guiding principles determined by the Authority to “Influence policy-making and the decisions at local, regional and national levels, acting as a voice for the South Downs National Park and a source of knowledge and expertise”.
- 2.2 The Public Affairs Strategy is designed to enable the Authority to decide on which emerging issues we should focus our energies and resources, both in terms of responding to challenges and being ready to grasp opportunities.

- 2.3 It is one of the key means by which we can enable the large-scale objectives of the Partnership Management Plan, the Local Plan and the Corporate Plan that sit outside of our direct control.
- 2.4 This Strategy has clear links to a number of key strategic organisational documents and strategies (see Figure 2 below). It does not duplicate the objectives set out in any of them and stems, itself, from the priorities identified by members in the Corporate Plan.

Figure 2: Context of the Public Affairs Strategy



3 Why Now?

- 3.1 The last year has shown that the external environment in which we operate is evolving quickly, sometimes with far reaching consequences for the National Park. The fast-evolving external environment in which we operate presents both challenges and opportunities.
- 3.2 While public affairs work currently takes place, it is delivered on a topic by topic basis which does not allow us to focus on a few key themes developed over a sustained period. It is focused messaging of this kind over a sustained period that is the way to influence senior opinion formers.
- 3.3 We now have a Customer Relationship Management database which will enable us to better engage with and manage our stakeholders. The history of our communications and interactions with stakeholders from across the organisation can be built up and shared with all staff and Members. This history can also be used to gauge how effectively we are delivering on the Public Affairs Strategy and feed into the revision and development of future strategies.
- 3.4 This strategy will cover December 2017–December 2019 and will be reviewed after 12 months to ensure that they are still the most relevant issues for us to work towards and so that we are constantly identifying emerging issues that will be focused on in future iterations of the strategy. It will be a living strategy that enable the focus on specific priorities to shift while maintaining the principles of how we go about our public affairs work.

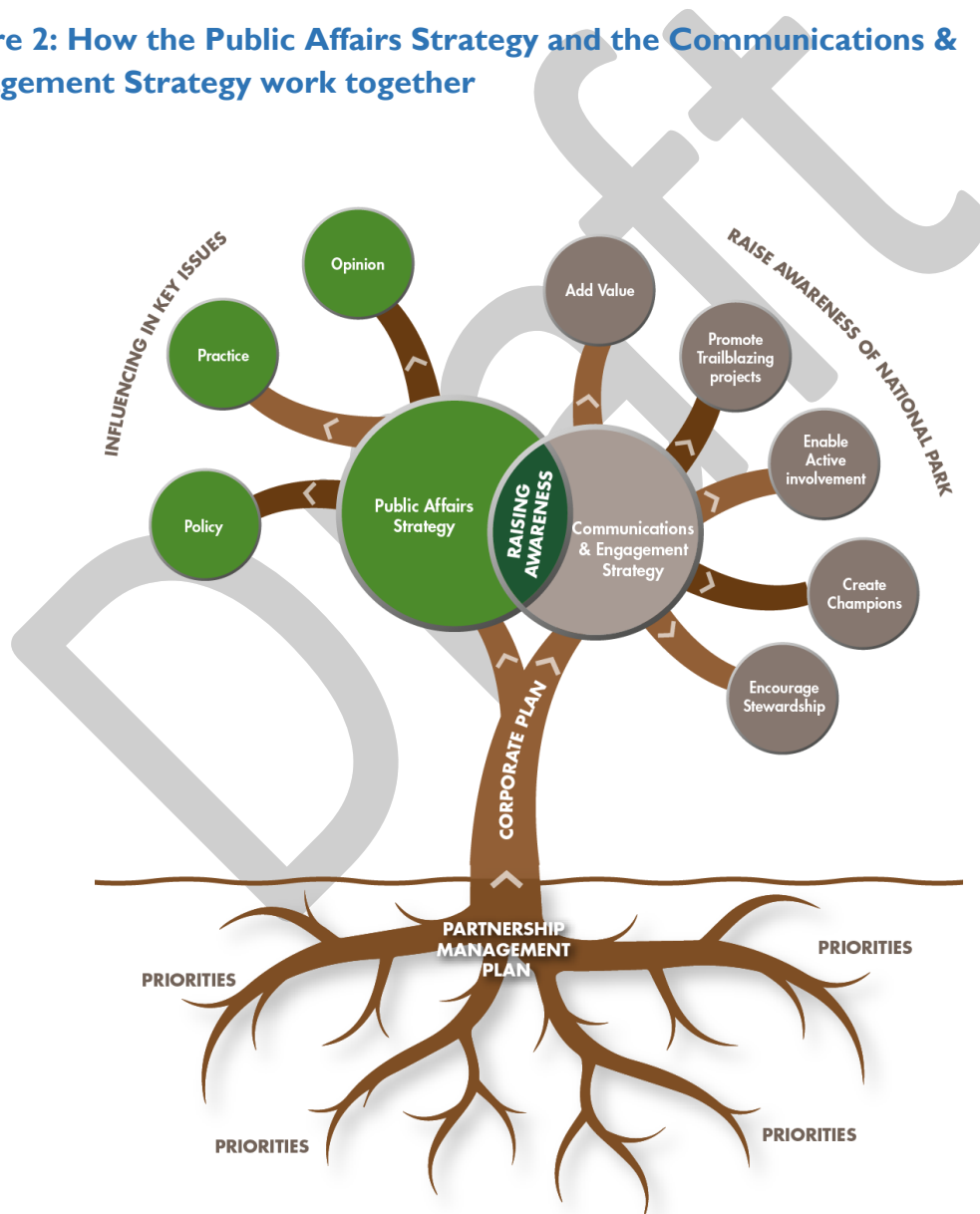
4 How our communications and public affairs will work alongside each other

4.1 The Public Affairs Strategy sits alongside the Communications & Engagement Strategy but unlike the Communications & Engagement Strategy it:

- does not cover the day-to-day detailed communications about the projects and wider work of the National Park and our partners;
- it is not about ongoing communication with stakeholders – this is covered in the Stakeholder Management Plan in Appendix 1; and
- it is also not the sole expression of our corporate or budget priorities.

See Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: How the Public Affairs Strategy and the Communications & Engagement Strategy work together



5 Guiding Principles for Public Affairs

5.1 This strategy sets out the strategic issues that our public affairs work will focus on in the coming 18 months. However, there are always issues emerging and, if we are to position ourselves as a

key stakeholder within the National Park family and wider Defra family, then a mechanism is needed which allows the Authority to react appropriately and quickly to emerging challenges, threats and opportunities.

- 5.2 The Authority has previously successfully used the concept of 'guiding principles' to provide Member steer to the work of officers. Examples include the Guiding Principles for the Authority <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/guiding-principles/> and the location principles agreed to enable officers to choose the correct locations for our entry signage.

Guiding principles for selecting key Public Affairs issues

We will prioritise issues:

- that will play a major role in the delivery of the Purposes for which the National Park has been designated and the duty of the Authority
- where the special qualities of the South Downs are at risk
- that directly relate to the priorities set out in the Government's 8 Point Plan for National Parks
- that are likely to generate significant interest and concern among the communities of the National Park
- that are likely to generate significant media interest; and

We will then vet each of these issues against three crucial tests:

- where we have a clear leadership role to play;
- where there is genuine ability for us to influence; and
- where the issue is time critical – ie, when there is a specific policy debate/practical development that means the window of opportunity to influence is now.

6 Key stakeholders

- 6.1 The SDNPA cannot create change on key issues for the National Park on its own. The PMP brings together the key stakeholders to identify the objectives that we collectively want to achieve and makes a commitment to working in partnership through a shared delivery plan.
- 6.2 Every kind of stakeholder needs coordinated relationship management and communication, ranging from an occasional 'light touch' to detailed, frequent updates.
- 6.3 Our public affairs work relies on our ability to effectively manage our relationships with key stakeholders in two ways:
- on an ongoing basis; and
 - on specific issues at specific times.
- 6.4 Successful engagement on specific issues relies on relationships built up with the stakeholder on an ongoing basis. Keeping the right people informed at the right time, with the right amount of detail is critical to making stakeholders feel valued, involved, and heard and to ensuring that when important issues arise, relationships management is ongoing and a level of communication is already in place.

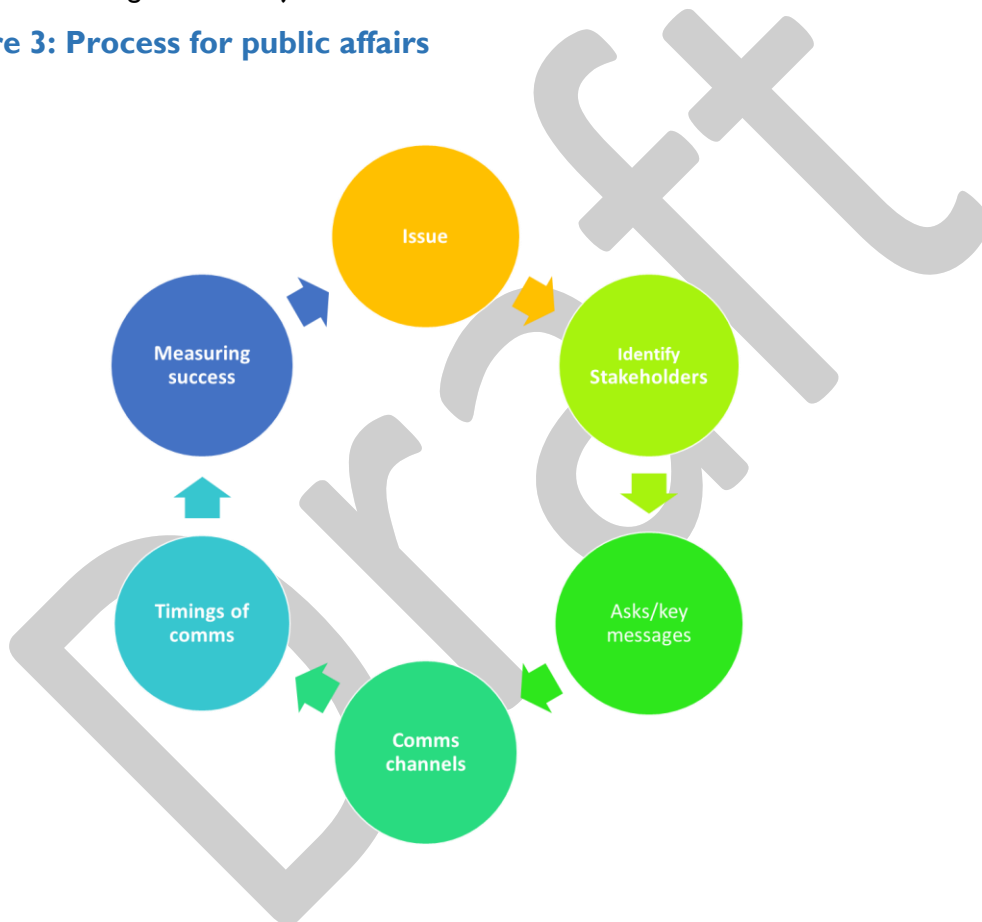
6.5 **Ongoing stakeholder management:**

Working with stakeholders on specific issues must sit on a foundation of ongoing Stakeholder Management that identifies key stakeholders and sets out how we will engage effectively with them throughout the lifecycle of the Partnership Management Plan in order to achieve its key outcomes. See Appendix I for more detail.

6.6 **Stakeholder management on specific issues:**

This strategy goes on to propose a number of priority issues for the National Park over the next 12–18 months and the specific objectives and asks we want to achieve during that period. For these and future specific issues we will identify the issue, our ‘asks’, the key relevant stakeholders, how we will communicate with them and how we will measure success against the objectives.

Figure 3: Process for public affairs



6.7 Identifying the key stakeholders for each issue will be done by applying four criteria:

1. **Contribution (value):** Does the stakeholder have information expertise on the issue that could be helpful?
2. **Influence:** How much influence does the stakeholder have and who with?
3. **Willingness to engage:** How willing is the stakeholder to engage?

4. **Necessity of involvement:** Is this someone who could derail or delegitimise the process if they were not included in the engagement?

6.8 **Channels:** We have many communications channels that we can use in pursuit of our public affairs objectives. Once key stakeholders have been identified we will look at the best channels to use to connect with/influence them. It is most likely that we will use a combination of different channels for each stakeholder. Our communication channels include, among others:

- Digital:
 - Website
 - Social media
 - e-newsletters
- Media:
 - Proactive and reactive media in print, radio and TV
- Leadership channels:
 - High-level meetings between leaders/chairs
 - Member interactions with their own bodies, local authorities, parishes etc
 - Director level meetings with partners
- Peer-to-peer channels:
 - Meetings at officer level
 - Interactions between officers and volunteers and public etc
- Strategic groups:
 - South Downs Partnership
 - Land Managers Groups
 - LEPs etc

6 Key Issues 2017–19

7.1 The Future of Farming

What is the issue?

- More than 85 per cent of the National Park is farmed and over two-thirds is currently managed through some form of agri-environment scheme.
- A post-Brexit future without the European Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) represents the biggest change to how we think about farming in decades.

Why this issue?

- **Key role to play:** The future of farming *is* the future of the National Park's landscapes and now is exactly the right time to ensure that is shaped in a way that supports our Vision for 2050.
- **Our Ability to influence:** The SDNPA is well placed to develop pilots that will influence the emerging post-Brexit plans that will shape the future of the National Park for many decades to come.
- **Time critical:** Brexit decisions being taken now will shape the future of land and environmental management in the UK.

What do we want?/Our objective:

As part of National Parks England we want to ensure that any new scheme gives the same level of protection and support or better to the environment as current schemes centred around three linked components:

- A national farming and rural management scheme (FARM)
- Locally led agri-env schemes for each National Park (FARM Plus)
- Wider rural development

In addition to our work as part of National Parks England, our key objective is that:

Farm clusters within the South Downs National Park to become innovative test beds for potential agri-environment schemes in lowland landscapes to address the three key drivers identified by Government:

- Creating resilient landscapes
- Placing people at the heart of the environment
- Natural capital

Baseline: 59 per cent of the National Park is under agri-environment schemes and spend per hectare is £83 (Monitoring Environmental Outcomes in Protected Landscapes [MEOPL])

Barriers:

Lots of competing priorities and focus on the economy may be to the detriment of a focus on how the environment and farming need to work together.

Key messages:

- The future of farming *is* the future of the National Park's landscapes.
- Sustainable, profitable farming and environmental protection can and must work in harmony.
- National Parks are the ideal place to test payment for ecosystem services.

7.2.1 Water

What is the issue?

The rivers of the South Downs National Park are in poor chemical and ecological condition (worse than in any other UK National Park).

Why this issue?

- **Key role to play:** The National Park is the one mechanism to bring together the three water companies working across the South East
- **Our Ability to influence:** We already have high level engagement and are discussing a number of joint areas of activity.
- **Time critical:** The three water companies in the South Downs area are currently carrying out the periodic review of their business, water resource and drought plans. This is a great opportunity to influence the plans to include catchment based works that can improve water quality and benefit the environment.

What do we want?/Our objective:

To improve the ecological and chemical conditions of the rivers within the South Downs National Park.

Baseline: Only 22% of Rivers in the South Downs are in Good Ecological Status (Environment Agency annual reporting)

Barriers:

Continuing lack of awareness on water pollution and water shortage issues.

Key messages:

- Our rivers are an integral part of the National Park landscape and they are in trouble.
- Catchment based approaches and more sustainable land management and water use can improve water quality for the 1.2 million people, wildlife and landscapes that depend on water from the South Downs.

7.3 Affordable Homes

What is the issue?

There is an urgent need for housing across the South of England to accommodate demand and ensure that the communities of the National Park continue to thrive. The SDNPA is uniquely placed to unlock new, well-designed additional affordable homes on rural exception sites.

- 293 affordable homes needed in the National Park each year to meet local need (housing & Economic Development Needs Assessment by GL Hearn [2017]).
- Average house price in National parks is over 11 times the average salary. This increases to more than 13 times for the South Downs National Park (Lloyds Bank National Parks Review 2016).

Why this issue?

- **Key role to play:** As the Planning Authority for the National Park we set the planning policies and manage the delivery of the Local Plan.
- **Our Ability to influence:** As the Planning Authority we can influence through our planning policies and Planning Committee decisions.
- **Time critical:** First Local Plan for the National Park with a focus on increasing the amount of affordable housing.

What do we want?/Our objective:

Increase the delivery of affordable homes across the National Park.

This would include:

- seeking the highest possible provision of on-site affordable housing in new developments;
- targeted measures including supporting rural exception sites and Community Land Trusts; and
- supporting the identification of sites for affordable housing through neighbourhood plans, via partnership working with affordable housing providers.

Baseline: Net completion of homes and affordable homes

	2014/15	2015/2016	2016/17
Total homes completed:	249	262	TBC
Affordable homes:	68	35	TBC

Barriers:

- Lack of available land
- No model for small-scale affordable housing delivery.

Key messages

- As set out in the draft Local Plan, we want to increase the amount of affordable new homes in the National Park.
- Rural exception sites could be used to alleviate the shortage of affordable housing in the National Park.

7.4 Sustainable Tourism

What is the issue?

The drive to grow international tourism and growing pressures on the landscape mean that innovative approaches are needed to increase the economic impact of tourism while also increasing its sustainability and dispersing it more widely to reduce ‘hotspots’.

- Low individual spend per visitor
- South Downs National Park not seen as a ‘destination’

Why this issue?

- **Key role to play:** 8 Point Plan focus on National Parks as key driver in growth of international tourism and rural growth.
- **Our ability to influence:** The shared identity has positioned us as the ‘destination brand’ for the South East
- **Time critical:**
 - Discover England Bid provides an opportunity to position National Parks as premier sustainable tourism destination.
 - LEPs are currently drawing up new strategic economic plans and tourism is a key driver of rural economy in South Downs.

Our objective:

South Downs National Park is a premier sustainable tourism destination unified under the South Downs National Parks shared identity.

Baseline: The South Downs Receives 25% of visitors to UK National Parks but only 6% of the economic spend (UK National Park Visitor Characteristics Report 2017).

Barriers:

Lack of funding/resource to tourism.

Key messages:

- We can create a unifying, quality visitor experience by joining forces behind the shared identity.
- Sustainable tourism is a driving force in the growth of the rural economy and vital to the communities of the South Downs and the wider South East.
- We want people to stay longer and spend more to feed into the rural economy.

7.5 Health & Wellbeing

What is the issue?

- There is strong and consistent evidence that green spaces improve health.
- 1 in 10 children aged 5–16 years have a diagnosable mental health problem. Analysis commissioned by NHS England found that the national cost of dedicated mental health support and services in England totals £34 billion each year.¹
- NHS England estimate that around £16 billion a year is spent on the direct medical costs of diabetes and conditions related to being overweight or obese.

Why this issue?

- **Key role to play:** National Parks were designed for the benefit of the Nation and all its people and provide a free ‘green health service’ resource.
- **Our Ability to influence:** We are working as part of part of the joint approach agreed by National Parks England and Public Health England.
- **Time critical:**
 - Health & Wellbeing identified in the Defra 8 Point Plan
 - Joint Accord on Public Health between PHE and National Parks in England is being launched.
 - Health & Wellbeing Conference on 11 October 2017 provides us with an ideal jumping off point to actively engage in this issue.

Our objective:

Promote the National Park as a green health service and increase opportunities for people to be able to access and enjoy it.

Baseline: Access to Nature and Green Space measure (TBC)

Barriers:

The South Downs National Park is an under-utilised and under-recognised asset for improving mental and physical health and wellbeing for its local populations and for the wider South East.

Key messages:

¹ *The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health: A report from the independent Mental Health Taskforce to the NHS in England* (February 2016)

The South Downs National Park provides a free, **green health service** for the South East and beyond and can make a real contribution to the battle against the growing obesity and mental health crises: National Parks are good for you.

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Appendix 1: Public Affairs Action Plan 2017-19 (this Action Plan is not complete. It demonstrates how the Action Plan will be structured -detailed work will continue when the priority themes have been identified by Members)

A stakeholder mapping exercise will use Contribution (value), influence, willingness to engage and necessity of involvement as the criteria to identify and prioritise stakeholders for each issue.

PMP Local PI Corp PI	Theme	Objective	Key messages	Key stakeholders	Asks	Channels	SDNPA staff resource	Timeline	KPIs/Measures of success
	Future of Farming	Farm clusters within the South Downs National Park to become innovative test beds for potential agri-environment schemes in lowland landscapes	<p>The future of farming <i>is</i> the future of the National Park's landscapes.</p> <p>National Parks are the ideal place to test payment for ecosystem services</p>	Policy/decision makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fund a pilot for lowland landscapes in SDNP - Share evidence on current schemes to feed into the development of the South Downs pilot 				
				Those managing land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sign up or encourage sign up to farm clusters and to the pilot. - Provide evidence of what works and what doesn't 				Increase sign up/coverage of farm clusters to x %

Appendix 2: Stakeholder Management Plan template (please note work on this is ongoing and we are first looking to make sure we have the structure of how we will make decisions and go about stakeholder management right)

- A.1 The following Stakeholder Management Plan identifies our key stakeholders and how we will manage our interactions with them on an ongoing basis. As a National Park committed to working in partnership we have a wide array of stakeholders and this can be challenging in terms of resources and managing stakeholder expectations.
- A.2 The Stakeholder Management Plan is a means by which we maximise our ability to engage with and successfully work with our stakeholders/partners. It is therefore important that the stakeholder management plan is realistically achievable.
- A.3 The new CRM system will underpin our ability to be able to track and manage stakeholder interaction but committed stakeholder management will take resources and commitment from both staff and Members to ensure interactions with our stakeholders consistently reflects the agreed activities in this plan.
- A.4 As with the specific priority issues set out in the Public Affairs Strategy, we will use the following criteria to prioritise engagement:
- **Contribution (value)**
 - **Influence**
 - **Willingness to engage**
 - **Necessity of involvement:**

PMP Outcomes & Policies Local Plan policies Corp Plan Objectives	Stakeholder	Our engagement Objective	Issues, opportunities and risks	Communications	Frequency	Key SDNP Contact	Measures of success/desired state of relationship
	UK National Parks						
	Defra						
	Statutory orgs , such as the Forestry Commission, Natural England and English Heritage						
	Local, Regional and National organisations with specialisms focusing on our seven special qualities and						

	whose values and priorities are in line with those of the SDNPA						
	Local authorities - including county councils and district councils						
	Land owners, managers and farmers						
	Town and parish councils						
	LEPs						
	Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)						
	Residents, community representatives						

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	and other key stakeholders						
	Visitors??						
	Higher education institutions both within the South Downs National Park boundary and outside it, where relevant						
	Specialists in their field, for example local historians, archaeologists, ecologists						
	Neighbourhood Planners						

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