

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Committee

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 21 NOVEMBER 2017

Held at the Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre, Midhurst at 10am

Present: Sebastian Anstruther, Ken Bodfish (Chair), Tim Burr, Chris Dowling, Janet Duncton, Mark Dunn, Daniel Humphreys, Helen Jackson, Russell Oppenheimer, Sue Saville and Pete West

Independent Members of the Committee: Lewis Doyle and Carole Nicholson

Ex-officio Members: Margaret Paren and Norman Dingemans

Other SDNPA Members: Doug Jones and Heather Baker

SDNPA Officers: Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive Officer), Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Louise Read (Monitoring Officer), Anne Rehill (Performance and Projects Manager), Steven Bedford (Principal Accountant), Alan Brough (Head of Business Services), Robin Parr (Head of Governance) and Catherine Sydenham (Committee Officer).

Also Attended by: Ruth James (Communications and Engagement Manager), Mike Hughes (Major Planning Projects and Performance Manager) and Adam Brown (Research and Evidence Officer)

OPENING REMARKS

132. The Chair opened the meeting.

133. The Chair welcomed all those present and stated that:

- The meeting was being webcast by the Authority and would be available for subsequent on-line viewing. Anyone entering the meeting was considered to have given consent to be filmed or recorded, and for the possible use of images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes.
- SDNPA Members had a primary responsibility for ensuring that the Authority furthered the National Park Purposes and Duty. Members regarded themselves first and foremost as Members of the Authority, and would act in the best interests of the National Park as a whole, rather than as representatives of their appointing body or any interest groups.

ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

134. Apologies were received from Jo Carr & Philip Ede.

ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

135. Carole Nicholson declared an interest in Item 11 as the Chair of the Sussex Wildlife Trust, a Partner in the Heathlands Reunited Project.

136. Helen Jackson declared an interest in Item 11 as a Member of the Heritage Lottery Fund Regional Committee that considered and awarded the Heathlands Reunited project grant.

ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2017

137. Two typographical errors were highlighted in minute 96, the word principles replaced principals and under development replaced underdevelopment.

138. The amended minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 19 September 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

139. There were none.

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ITEM 5: URGENT MATTERS

140. There were none

ITEM 6: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

141. There were no members of public in attendance who had requested to speak.

ITEM 7: NEED FOR PART II EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

142. **RESOLVED:** It was resolved that the Committee would not move into Part II for Item 16, and the Exempt Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 19 September 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

AUDIT

ITEM 8: BUDGET MONITORING REPORT FOR QUARTER 2 2017/18

143. The Principal Accountant introduced report PR22/17.

144. The Committee commented that:

- Cash Flow should be included within future budget reports to the Committee.
- A report on Estates (Area Offices), the approach taken and what options are open to the Authority should be brought to a future Committee.

145. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- The new Post, not included in the original budget, was for a second Design Officer within the Planning team. This post would be included in future budgets.
- Cash Flow was on target with the Investment Profile and showed quarterly deposits.
- The Eastern Area team office at Stanmer Park had become uninhabitable due to health and safety issues. New temporary accommodation had been found at the Sussex Innovation Centre at Sussex University whilst the medium term solution at Stanmer workshop is implemented. This would put additional pressure on the budget as the rent for the portacabin was negligible.
- Other pressures will soon emerge as the SDNPA has been given notice to vacate the Central Area office at Singleton and will soon need to find an alternative site for the Wealden Office (currently at the Midhurst Depot).
- The majority of the Authority's reserves were allocated and it was likely that the current projected under spend would be reduced by the end of the financial year.

146. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee

1. Noted the 2017/18 revenue forecast underspend position of £110,000 as at Quarter 2.
2. Noted the 2017/18 capital forecast position of zero variance as at Quarter 2.
3. Noted the current Treasury Management overview and position.

ITEM 9: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

147. The Head of Governance introduced report PR23/17.

148. The Committee commented that:

- If there was a change in risk probability it would be helpful to have a supportive explanation within the text.
- It would be helpful to have an oral update at the Committee on any risk probability that may have changed since the publication of the report.

149. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- Within the table of the 'Risk Register' the arrows showed expected direction of travel,

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the ‘square’ was the inherent risk, before any action was taken and the ‘x’ was the residual risk, after mitigation had been put in place.

150. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee noted the Corporate Risk Register as at November 2017

POLICY

ITEM 10: PUBLIC AFFAIRS STRATEGY

151. The Communications and Engagement Manager introduced report PR24/17, gave a [presentation](#) and explained to the Committee that the Public Affairs Strategy would influence policy, practice and opinion and was just one of the Authority’s many work delivery mechanisms.
152. The Chief Executive explained that report PR24/17 set out five possible issues as the focus for our current advocacy work, and that the Chair of the Committee had asked that Officers identify which three of the five issues they thought should be the priority for the next 12-18 months. The Chief Executive explained that Officers were not choosing between Policy areas on the basis of importance but issues that were currently time critical and where we could have influence. The Officers recommended that the three priority issues be: The Future of Farming; Water; and Affordable Homes.
153. Authority Member, Russell Oppenheimer, who had been involved in the production of the draft Public Affairs Strategy, went on to further introduce report PR24/17 and stated that once the three priority issues were agreed messages would be refined that would be clearly understood by everybody; Members would be the ambassadors of the messages; and digital channels would play a big part in the sharing of the messages with key audiences.
154. The Committee debated which three priority issues should be recommended to the Full Authority for approval. In the debate the committee made the following points:
- The sale of assets by public bodies, and acquisitions, should be further up the priority list but Members also commented that access rights were not affected by land ownership.
 - SDNPA was not the housing Authority and therefore other agencies had affordable homes on their agenda and therefore affordable housing should not be one of the three priority issues.
 - The Local Plan would not be fully adopted for a year and therefore it would be better to make Affordable Housing a priority at that time. The Local Plan would give the Authority power and clarity in the messages that it gives.
 - Affordable Homes were important and should be a priority because local people that work in the National Park, and had lived here all their lives, would have liked to continue to be able to so.
 - Affordable Housing was needed within the National Park but the Authority should not give the perception that it was welcoming overdevelopment.
 - Some of the priority issues require partnership with other National Parks as the issue was not confined to the South Downs National Park. There is an argument for the Authority to concentrate on issues unique to this landscape.
 - Sustainable tourism should be a strong priority as not many other agencies or bodies had this high on their agenda.
 - Sensible to have priority issues that would influence policies both locally and nationally.
 - The Authority’s funding came from Central Government and not local tax payers and therefore the National Park Purposes should be born in mind when deciding on the three priority issues.

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- Sustainable tourism could also influence the key issue of health and well-being.
 - Disabled Access should be a priority issue.
 - It was sensible to promote the National Park.
 - There was a danger that the Authority would become wholly reactive to problems rather than proactive. It was important that the Authority was equally proactive and reactive.
 - If SDNPA can influence national debate, and nobody else is currently doing the work, it should be a priority.
155. Members identified that before the draft Public Affairs Strategy was presented to the Full Authority it should contain the following further information:
- A full list of stakeholders
 - Clearer SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time limited) objectives and timeline
 - Evidence that the Authority had sufficient resources to be able to deliver
156. Chris Dowling joined the meeting.
157. The Committee voted on the three priority issues. Each Committee Member had three votes to use.
158. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:
1. Subject to the specific issues raised by the Members being addressed, the draft Public Affairs Strategy was recommended to the NPA for approval.
 2. Agreed to recommend to the NPA: (1) Future of Farming; (2) Water; (3) Sustainable Tourism as the three priority areas for the Public Affairs Strategy for a period agreed by the NPA

PERFORMANCE AND PROCEDURES

ITEM 11: PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT – HEATHLANDS REUNITED

159. The Performance and Projects Manager introduced report PR25/17 and explained it was suggested that all the recommendations in the evaluation were taken forward into the Improvement Plan. The evaluation highlighted similar issues to that of the Secrets of the Highwood Project, despite being completed by a different organisation. The Performance and Projects Manager reported that a new Project Manager had been recruited.
160. Heather Baker joined the meeting.
161. The Committee commented that:
- The report highlighted a lack of diversity in volunteer groups.
 - Heathlands were well used, however some members of the public were mis-using them due to a lack of awareness of good practice.
 - Low engagement levels needed to be addressed as this was critical to the project's success. The project should have examined whether it was targeting the correct audience and communicating with them in a timely and effective way.
 - The project needed more measurable targets.
 - Effective community engagement was different to communication. Effectively engaging with the correct communities and having a communications strategy at the project's outset was what made these projects successful. Effective community engagement would reflect well on the South Downs National Park Authority as it underpinned every strategy within the Partnership Management Plan.

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162. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The improvement plan shows measures had been put in place to improve how information was communicated, volunteers were managed and events planned.
 - Measures were currently in place for some of the issues raised as the report was completed at the end of year one, in September 2017.
 - The new Project Manager post would be responsible for assessing where the project was to date and making recommendations.
 - Additional resource had been added to the project and work would be completed with the Communications and Engagement Manager to ensure the correct audience was being engaged with.
163. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee :
1. Received the end of year 1 project evaluation for Heathlands Reunited at Appendix 1
 2. Agreed that the learning from the evaluation be added to the improvement plan as set out in Appendix 2

ITEM 12: QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT 2017/18

164. The Performance and Projects Manager introduced report PR26/17 and stated that overall the Authority's performance was positive, one new project had been approved. There was an ongoing issue with the accommodation for the Eastern Area team but this had not affected the Authority's productivity as the Eastern Area team had kept work going, including volunteer days, without an office to operate from.
165. The Major Planning and Performance Projects Officer gave a [presentation](#) which explained the planning information with report PR26/17 and explained that appeal decisions were now reported quarterly to Planning Committee. The slight drop in the speed of decision making for Quarter 2 was common in the summer holiday period and the figures meet all Government targets. Validation still remained a concern, these figures were not required to be reported to Central Government but timeliness of validation is part of the customer's experience of our planning system and SDNPA were working closely with three Host Authorities to improve these statistics.
166. The Committee commented that:
- It should not just be the quantity and speed of validated cases that was examined but the quality of the validation undertaken and this should be reflected in conversations with host authorities.
 - A report of the general planning performance data back to 2011, which showed the direction of travel, should be brought to a future committee.
 - Once the eight week deadline had passed, if an extension was not agreed, there was no incentive to progress the application in a timely manner.
167. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- More information on the Broadband Rural Pilot would be in the report for Quarter 3 as Officers work was currently focused elsewhere.
 - A Planning customer survey had been undertaken to understand users' view of our planning service. The results would be compared to a similar survey three years ago.
 - After the Local Plan had been adopted SDNPA would be required to do a new Validation list, this would include a new set of information required for different types of application.
 - 'Parks for People' project risks fall with Brighton and Hove City Council and Plumpton College, SDNPA was a partner in the project but the Authority's role was minor in

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comparison and therefore there was not a reputational risk.

- Delivering the planning system through Service Level Agreements and in partnership was always going to be a challenge for the Authority but it gives the Authority lots of positive engagement with local communities. SDNPA were National Leaders in the extent we used partnerships to deliver the planning service.

168. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:

1. Received the Quarter 2 performance report

ITEM 13: RECONSTITUTION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING TASK AND FINISH GROUP

169. The Head of Governance introduced report PR27/17 and explained that membership of the Task and Finish Group was open to all members of the Authority.

170. The Committee commented that:

- A project that could be considered by the Task and Finish Group was the sponsorship of a national competition for an affordable home made out of local materials.
- The ‘Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group’ needed to be properly focused, delivered and achieve what it set out to.

171. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- The Task and Finish Group could engage external bodies and experts to help achieve its aims and objectives as it saw fit.

172. **RESOLVED:** that the Committee:

1. Agreed to the re-establishment of the “Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group” with the terms of reference set out at Appendix 1.
2. Invited written expressions of interest from Members to be part of the core group for the above, to be notified to the Head of Governance.
3. Delegated authority to the Director of Planning in consultation with the Chair of P&R Committee, to appoint the membership of the group.

ITEM 14: TENDER FOR GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION (GI) SERVICES

173. The Performance and Projects Manager introduced report PR28/17.

174. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:

1. Approved the approach to the retender for GI services and authorised the commencement of the procurement.
2. Agreed that the approval of tender documentation and the decision to award the contract, following an open tendering process, was delegated to the Chief Executive

GRANTS AND PROJECTS

ITEM 15: MID YEAR PROJECT UPDATE

175. The Performance and Projects Manager introduced report PR29/17 and explained 2 new projects from the Strategic Fund had been approved and one new project initiation document would be coming to a future committee.

176. Member Doug Jones, Chair of the Sustainable Communities Fund (SCF) Panel, gave the committee a short update. Approximately £20,000 was allocated each year into the SCF. Once allocated, money sat in the SDNPA accounts until projects were completed.

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Approximately 200 projects, across the whole National Park, had been supported since the start of the SCF. The projects attracted good media cover reflecting well on the South Downs National Park Authority. Good leverage was obtained as for every £1 put in by the SCF approximately £11 was put in by other partners. SCF funding has contributed to projects supporting approximately 38 of the 57 policies in the Partnership Management Plan.

177. The Committee commented that:

- It would be useful to have a future report on the SCF total spend which included the leverage obtained, percentage of community engagement and which PMP objectives were being met by the completed projects.
- Local villages and communities expressed their thanks to the SCF for the huge range of projects that were supported right across the National Park.
- When major projects were listed it would be helpful to have stated who the lead partner was and who the other partners were.

178. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- Officers kept a close eye on the projects with allocated funds and they completed an annual exercise which released funds back into general accounts for projects that were not going to start.
- Better quality applications were now coming forward.

179. Mark Dunn left the meeting

180. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:

1. Received the overview of major project delivery and the current budget position of the Strategic Fund
2. Received the current position of the Sustainable Communities Fund

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 1pm

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