

Report to	Policy & Resources Committee
Date	29 March 2018
By	Director of Countryside & Policy Management
Title of Report Decision	Highfield Whole Estate Plan

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to endorse the Highfield Whole Estate Plan.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In 2015 the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) introduced the idea of Whole Estate Plans, meeting with numerous Estates with significant land holdings within the National Park area (to date around 28 holdings have been engaged). A Whole Estate Plan (WEP) aims to enable collaboration between individual estates and the National Park Authority to achieve the ambitions of the Estate / Farm / School and the purposes of the National Park, and deliver the Partnership Management Plan. A WEP is a non-statutory plan which demonstrates the overall position and aspirations an organisation has as an estate and plans do not have to cover a specific time period, and may be updated to reflect changes in circumstance or withdrawn if appropriate.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 WEPs are a progressive and almost unique approach by a planning authority or National Park Authority in the UK as they look to foster good working relationships with key stakeholders and facilitate better understanding of the issues surrounding sustainable rural estate communities – of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. They are not focused on or to be limited to planning matters but rather the whole husbandry of the Estate – farming, woodland management, conservation, access provision etc.
- 2.2 An endorsed Whole Estate Plan (WEP) will be a material consideration in determining planning applications and will provide a solidly understood contextual background to any development proposals. The inclusion of a development proposal within a WEP however does not guarantee that planning permission will be granted and any proposal will still need to be comply with relevant development plan policies. A WEP can also be used to help guide and support funding bids, future neighbourhood plan production, agri-environment and forestry schemes and with other Natural Capital projects. Beyond the finished product, the WEP process also provides value in terms of relationship building; between the Estate and the SDNPA, as well as the local community.

3. Issues for consideration

- 3.1 A WEP is comprised of 4 elements: a Vision, an Asset Audit, Ecosystem Services Analysis, and an Action Plan. Officers look at how all these elements relate to each other, i.e. is the Vision a genuine representation of the actions proposed, and are the actions evidenced by the Asset Audit and Ecosystem Services Analysis? Estates should also be able to demonstrate that they have engaged with the local community during the process of producing the WEP.
- 3.2 Highfield Estate have been engaged in the WEP process from an early stage in its inception in

the SDNP. A WEP (**Appendix I**) for the Highfield Estate was submitted for endorsement in November 2017, accompanied by a suite of supporting information, which form appendices to the WEP. This includes the Ecological and Woodland Management Plans for the Estate and the Travel Plan for the School. There have been amendments throughout these final stages to address final comments raised by officers from the Countryside & Policy and then Planning Directorates. There has also been contact from an early stage with relevant Parishes and other interested parties, e.g. staff, pupils and parents. The WEP is well laid out, well presented and easy to read. It follows the structure previously suggested by the SDNPA and has responded positively to comments made by officers throughout the process.

- 3.3 This is the first institution to have submitted a WEP for endorsement and therefore, the focus is understandably narrower than with the WEPs that have come before P&R Committee. Nevertheless, the WEP successfully demonstrates how the different aspects of the Estate; the schools, farming activity, woodland management, relate to and support one another.
- 3.4 Overall, it is considered that the Estate has responded positively to the suggestions made by officers during the formation of the WEP. The finished document is a successful example of joint working, which clearly demonstrates the Estate's aspirations and strategy for fulfilling the aims and objectives of their WEP, in the context of the National Park setting. The following provides a summary assessment of each of the 4 elements that make up the WEP and the evidence of community consultation.

Vision

- 3.5 The Highfield Estate has a clear, overarching Vision, which applies across all functions of the Estate. It then draws out more specific Visions for the School and the remaining Estate land. This is a different approach to that which has come previously, but works given the focus of the Estate. All aspects of the Vision successfully capture the desire to conserve and enhance all facets of the landscape.

Asset Audit

- 3.6 The Asset Audit provides the geographical and historical context for the Estate. The Audit first looks at the whole Estate to provide a landscape context and proceeds to consider in further detail a series of 'character areas', for example, Stanley Farm and the surrounding land, the Schools site and the Estate Woodland. A more in-depth look at the Biomass heating system, installed in 2012, is included, which demonstrates how the estate woodland supports the heating of the School buildings. It is a successful example of the synergy between the different uses on the Estate. The Audit is well supplemented and evidence by a series of photographs and maps, which help to reinforce the connection the Estate has to the surrounding landscape character. This is considered to be a thorough review of the assets within the Estate.

Ecosystem Services Analysis

- 3.7 Highfield Estate has followed the current SDNPA recommended format for producing the Ecosystem Services Analysis. The SDNPA Countryside and Policy Directorate has provided feedback and advice on where potential weaknesses and opportunities could be found. It is considered that this represents a comprehensive analysis of the ecosystem services the Estate benefits from.

Action Plan

- 3.8 Actions have been grouped around ecological management, woodland management and the School's built development. The latter also provides likely time frames for when these projects may be progressed. A concept masterplan demonstrating how some of these projects could be delivered has been appended to the WEP. The Estate recognise that this will be subject to consideration through the planning process and that the inclusion of this plan does not guarantee planning permission. The project details have been kept deliberately vague to ensure the SDNPA does not find itself in a position of unequivocal support for specific projects, prior to the relevant applications being submitted.

3.9 Additional areas for where specific actions could be highlighted have been suggested by SDNPA, such as improvements to circulation and management of vehicles on the Estate, particularly looking at reducing car use associated with the Schools. These have been taken on board by the Estate and reflected in this section. The projects are all well linked to the Asset Audit and Ecosystem Services Analysis and are considered to support the Vision for the Estate.

Community Consultation

3.10 The community consultation activity the Estate has carried out has been detailed as part of the Connectivity section of the Asset Audit. School staff have been engaged in the development of the WEP, and encouraged to make recommendations. The Parish Council has been kept informed through the process and the Estate has also engaged in the Neighbourhood Plan process. Overall, it is considered that the requirements for community consultation have been met in this instance.

4. Options & cost implications

4.1 There are no direct cost implications associated with the consideration of the endorsement of the WEP. There will be a likelihood once endorsed that the Authority may be expected to work with the Estate to realise some of the projects identified.

5. Next steps

5.1 If the WEP is endorsed, it will be placed on the SDNPA website and officers will be made aware that is now a material consideration in the assessment of planning applications.

6. Other Implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No, although applications for grant funds or planning permission may be submitted for consideration by other forums relating to actions highlighted within the WEP.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	No. If endorsed, the WEP will be included on the SDNPA website, however update and review of the document is the responsibility of the Estate. If the WEP is amended, it will need to be considered again by Officers and Members.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	N/A
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	No
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	This decision has no direct equalities implications. This document will be used to inform future decisions by the Authority, which will be subject to their own equalities impact assessments.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	No
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	No
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	No
Are there any Data	None

Protection implications?	
Are there any Sustainability implications based on the 5 principles set out in the SDNPA Sustainability Strategy.	The WEP has principles 1-3 at its core, which is evidenced by the Plan being set within the context of the SDNP Partnership Management Plan and to support the delivery of the draft Local Plan.

7. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

- 7.1 There is the potential for a reputational risk for the SDNPA through failure of endorsement after an Estate has gone through the process of producing a WEP that meets the criteria for endorsement. There is also a risk of WEPs being misunderstood and considered as planning documents only, or being interpreted as a 'green light' for development. Both of these concerns can be mitigated by providing continued support to Estates, case officers and other interested parties and providing guidance on the SDNPA website.

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Appendices I. Highfield Whole Estate Plan (attached as separate document)
SDNPA Consultees Director of Countryside Policy and Management; Director of Planning; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services,
External Consultees None
Background Documents [SDNPA Whole Estate Plan Guidelines](#)
[SDNP Partnership Management Plan 2014-2019](#)