

Agenda Item 9
Report NPA12/18

Report to	South Downs National Park Authority
Date	26 April 2018
By	Chief Executive Officer
Title of Report Note	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 and the announcements that have been made in the month since my last report to the 22 March 2018 NPA.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Following the flurry of announcements on environment and farming made by Defra, Michael Gove and the Prime Minister in January and early February, which were covered in my last report, things have been a little quieter in terms of communications from Westminster. This has allowed us to analyse the new proposals and shape our responses including **"Farming the Future"**, our expression of interest to run a pilot scheme here in the National Park.
- 2.2 In the end, concepts were submitted from all ten English National Parks, though these ranged from extensive proposals (Exmoor) to a few bullet points (Northumberland). There was a rapid acknowledgement from Defra which then convened a meeting for all NPs in Crewe on Monday 9th April, which we attended. At this session it was clear that the Department's top priority is to test options for a new broadly accessible scheme which can be applied across the whole of England, before thinking about a higher level element which might be more bespoke and driven by local landscapes. Along with some other National Parks we are in a very good position to help Defra with this because our proposal includes trialling a new online application process for schemes. We can also work with our six farm clusters in the NP (and a total of fifteen clusters across the wider SE) to identify farmers who want to participate in the trial.
- 2.3 As mentioned in my last report, NPE is co-ordinating a response to **"Health and Harmony"** the Command Paper on the future of food, farming and the environment published on 27 February. The draft response makes a number of points of particular relevance to the South Downs. These include the importance of integrating agriculture and forestry policy, water resource management, the need to tailor future schemes to the characteristics of specific landscapes rather than "one size fits all" and, crucially, the fact that the lowlands have just as much nationally and internationally important habitats as the uplands.
- 2.4 We are also awaiting an announcement on who has been chosen to Chair the **"21st century Hobhouse Review"**. This was announced in the 25 Year Plan and will consider how designated landscapes are financed and whether there is scope for new AONBs and National Parks. It will also examine opportunities to enhance the environment in existing designations.

3. Planning

- 3.1 In terms of planning performance for the 2017/18 financial year speed of decision making remains good with 86% of applications in the year determined within statutory timescales. As usual, all government targets for the year have been met. Appeal performance continues to be sound with 70% of planning appeals dismissed in the financial year. This is our Authority's best performance on planning appeals for a financial year and represents an improvement on our previous best of 67% of appeals dismissed in 2016/17.
- 3.2 We have now had two quarters with our host authorities operating under the October 2017 Section 101 agreements. These contracts are based on a pay per application model which has made our planning operations more efficient whilst at the same time requiring higher performance standards. The host authority, and our own, planning performance is subject to more robust regular monitoring and review.
- 3.3 Following P&R Committee in March, where the Highfield and Iford **Whole Estate Plans** were endorsed, the SDNPA has now endorsed 4 WEPs. Members will be visiting the Glynde Estate this month, who will be submitting their WEP for endorsement later this year. We continue to work with the estates who have had plans endorsed to help bring the actions identified to fruition, as well as other estates and landowners, who are progressing their own WEPs.

4. Progress of Existing Projects

- 4.1 Consultants have been appointed to deliver a **Sussex Heritage Coast Interpretation project**. This will include wider consultation and an interpretation strategy. I will update Members on progress in future reports.
- 4.2 There are currently two projects underway in the **Truleigh Hill** area. The first is the Truleigh Hill Habitat and Access project which started in September 2017. This is a project funded partially by the S106 Rampion mitigation fund for £29,000 and with an additional contribution of £20,000 by the National Grid.
- 4.3 The Truleigh Hill Habitat and Access project has formed a partnership between the YHA, The Conservation Volunteers and SDNPA; using volunteers from both the YHA and TCV in the management of the site field & chalk grassland. The landowner and tenant permissions required have been obtained. Ecological surveys have been finalised and method statements produced. A Planning application has now been submitted for works to the fencing adjacent to the South Downs Way. The Dew pond has been restored with the help of volunteers and meetings held with Disabled Ramblers to review an easy access path proposal. A further 56 volunteer days and contractor works are currently planned. This project is scheduled for completion in September 2018.
- 4.4 The second project the Truleigh Hill Landscape Project, is a 2 year project recently given the go-ahead at the P&R Committee. A total of £84,000 has been awarded from the S106 Rampion mitigation fund and will be used to fund a 2 year staff post for a landscape specialist to undertake a landscape management strategy and work with the local community to develop and implement an action plan to restore the landscape in the Truleigh Hill area. This work has yet to commence.

5. Volunteers and Delivery

- 5.1 From January to March members of the Volunteer Ranger Service carried out 229 practical, promotional and training tasks. At the time of writing, information on only 159 of these was confirmed, giving a total of 1074 days of volunteer support. It is estimated that this total will rise to approximately 1426 overall for the quarter.
- 5.2 The Lodge Copse and Church Copse groups continued their coppicing cycles for their respective locations, and Lodge Copse set-up their agreement for the forthcoming financial year. There were 45 days of coppicing work in total carried out by Volunteer Rangers over the quarter.
- 5.3 The Wealden Heaths volunteers undertook 10 task days hedge laying at Pulborough Brooks and Stedham Campsite and the Central Downs volunteers also completed 3 days of hedge laying in Binsted. Mark Hayward carried out 7 days of hedge laying training sessions at Saddlescombe Farm which was attended by 59 of the Eastern Area volunteers

overall. 44 tasks were carried out on Access Land, most of which involved scrub clearance.

- 5.4 The **South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service** held its Annual General Meeting at the Avenue Pavilion in Petersfield on Saturday 17 March 2018. Over 50 volunteers were in attendance from all areas of the National Park. The main business was concluded in the morning with presentations on the People of Petersfield Heath project and a VRS funded Travel Fellowship visit to the *Parc Naturel Regional des Pyrenees Ariegeoise* by volunteers Brian & Joan Wignall. Margaret Paren presented two 10-year long service awards to volunteers Dave Shepley and John Walton. The afternoon consisted of a range of Petersfield related tours which went ahead in true VRS style despite the horizontal blizzard!

6. Corporate Update

- 6.1 On Friday 14th September Staff, Members and Volunteers will be invited to walk the South Downs Way, in a special event being organised to raise awareness and funds for the Trust's "**Mend our Way**" appeal. This initiative is being driven by our newly formed staff Adventure group. If successful, we hope this might become an annual event encouraging the wider public to experience the special Health and Wellbeing benefits of getting out and about in the National Park.
- 6.2 The National Trail will be broken down into 13 individual legs of varying distance, designed to suit all abilities. The 13 legs will be completed simultaneously and participants will be able to walk, dog walk, run, cycle or (if you are lucky enough to have a horse at your disposal) ride. We hope this challenge will assist in raising funds for the South Downs Way, provide positive exposure for the National Park and allow us to start practicing what we preach when it comes to Health and Wellbeing.
- 6.3 April marked the end of our first year with a fully functioning **Income Generation Team** and the results have been very positive. Though the team were set up primarily to establish our new Charitable Trust, £65k was raised directly for the National Park Authority. £49k of this is restricted for projects (including improvements in Truleigh Hill and new "Miles without Stiles" routes) with £16k secured as unrestricted Income.
- 6.4 Established in October, the **South Downs National Park Trust** has already raised £111k. Much of this will go towards the Trust's first initial appeal, funding much needed improvements to the South Downs Way. I am pleased to report that this strong performance seems set to continue, with £80k already agreed for the coming financial year.

7. Media and Communications

- 7.1 We marked the National Park's **8th birthday on 31 March** by releasing a series of eight clips and messages around heathland species over the Easter bank holiday weekend, culminating with the release of our mini-documentary on heathland made by BigWave TV and narrated by Nick Heasman. As of 12 April the clips and film have together achieved 2,620 engagements (likes, shares comments and retweets) on Facebook and Twitter with total opportunities to view of 90,389. The clips placed on Instagram have been watched 1,967 times. A second mini-documentary and clips on chalk downland will be released in July ahead of our new chalk grassland event in Brighton.
- 7.2 We published a strong response to claims in the Chichester Observer that the SDNPA had 'sprung' a request for additional housing on Chichester District Council. This resulted in good coverage in the next week's paper emphasising that we have been working with the council on the question since last autumn.
- 7.3 We also achieved a feature on the **Mend our Way campaign** in the Chichester Observer. Later this month we will launch the next phase of the campaign with announcements that we are more than 50 per cent of the way towards our target and that local businesses along the route are lending their support with a series of collection points.
- 7.4 We are continuing to push our **Take the Lead** messaging through all of our communication channels and are working with partners to take up additional opportunities, for example, sharing the videos for partners to show at their sites and paying for slots at the Film on a Farm film showings happening this summer.

- 7.5 The next phase of the campaign is to target dog owners through veterinary practices and other services dog owners may use. We have begun discussions with a large dog insurance provider to promote our messages to their customers and are continuing to explore similar opportunities.
- 7.6 We aim to market the campaign to local veterinary practices over the next quarter to stock our information and to build on towards a larger campaign around dog worrying early in 2019 based around the idea of ‘Do you know where your dog is?’, highlighting that many dog attacks happen at night when a dog may have escaped from home without their owner noticing. We want to pull together more involvement from farmers and create material with them as spokespeople.
- 8. Conclusion**
- 8.1 As with previous reports, my aim has been to provide an overview of the highlights of the period since my report to the 22 March 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	Chief Executive; Director of Countryside Policy & Management; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services, Business Service Manager
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	N/A