

**Agenda Item 11
Report NPA18/18**

Report to	South Downs National Park Authority
Date	3 July 2018
By	Chief Executive Officer
Title of Report	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 since my last report to the 26 April 2018 NPA.

2. Introduction

2.1 On Sunday 27 May Defra launched the **new Hobhouse review of National Parks and AONBs** that was promised in the 25 year Plan for the Environment. This was headlined as plans for “a new wave of National Parks” and that is where most of the subsequent media coverage has focused. I don't think that the eventual outcome will be on this scale but it is clear that Michael Gove is interested in designating one or more new National Parks and in simplifying the process of extending existing boundaries.

2.2 The Secretary of State has asked journalist and writer Julian Glover to Chair the review and he has already written to Margaret and me. Julian Glover is the associate editor at the London Evening Standard who has worked at the Guardian and as a Special Adviser in Number 10 and the Department for Transport. He lives in the Peak District and has a long track record of advocating countryside issues. He will be supported by an advisory panel of experts who include Sarah Mukherjee, the CEO of the Crop Protection Association and member of the Norfolk Broads National Park who spoke in the closing session of last year's national conference that was hosted by SDNPA.

2.3 The terms of reference for the Review explain that “at the outset it is important to state one thing the review will not do: propose reductions in either the geographic extent or the protections given to England's designated landscapes”. Then they go on to state that the objectives of the Review are to examine and make recommendations on:

- the existing statutory purposes for National Parks and AONBs and how effectively they are being met
- the alignment of these purposes with the goals set out in the 25-Year Plan for the Environment
- the case for extension or creation of new designated areas
- how to improve individual and collective governance of National Parks and AONBs, and how that governance interacts with other national assets
- the financing of National Parks and AONBs
- how to enhance the environment and biodiversity in existing designations

- how to build on the existing eight-point plan for National Parks and to connect more people with the natural environment from all sections of society and improve health and wellbeing
 - how well National Parks and AONBs support communities.
- 2.4 It is extremely welcome that health and wellbeing, environmental enhancement and the 8 point plan feature so prominently. The inclusion of financing was widely anticipated in Members' previous discussions on the budget and will increase the emphasis on our own work on income generation.
- 2.5 In our response to Julian Glover we have offered to support his review team with a secondee and have assured him that he is welcome to visit the South Downs at any time. We have drawn attention to our innovative work on income generation, shared services, farm clusters, the private sector application of natural capital and partnership based planning, explaining that we would be happy to explore any of these further with his team. We have also written to our neighbouring AONBs to propose that we should work together to present to the Review a narrative of joint working in mixed lowland landscapes under pressure from development and large neighbouring urban populations.
- 2.6 There is not as yet a clear process or timetable for the Review – the terms of reference simply state that a more detailed timetable will be developed following its commencement. It is, however, clear that it will report to Defra in 2019 to coincide with the 70th Anniversary of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act.

3. Planning

- 3.1 The **South Downs Local Plan** was submitted to the Secretary of State for examination on 27 April 2018. This triggered the start of the examination in public, which will end with the receipt of the final Inspector's report. Mr Brian Sims has been appointed as the Inspector for the examination and Mr Chris Banks of Banks Solutions is our Programme Officer. The Submission Local Plan and all its accompanying evidence based study has been published on our examination website. It is likely that the hearings will take place in October/November. The timetable for the hearings and all other updates will be published on the examination website.

4. Progress of Existing Projects

- 4.1 Following my last report National Parks England (NPE) have now submitted a response to the 'Health and Harmony' consultation, the command paper on the **future of food, farming and the environment**. The response fully supports the 'public payments for public goods' principle, with natural capital at its core, the need to adopt an outcome-based approach for the next Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMs) and for increased ownership by farmers / land managers in the schemes in which they participate. It also highlights the need to adopt a place-based approach in order to deliver multiple public benefits, tailoring ELMs across England according to landscape characteristics, the need for a locally administered rural development scheme once the current LEADER programme ends in 2020 and the importance of lowland landscapes in addition to the uplands.
- 4.2 With particular regard to the new ELMs post Brexit, it would appear from NPE / Defra liaison that the current preferred option is for a 'Whole Farm Plan' approach, which encompasses the whole farm operation (production, environment and recreation). It would also appear that the preference is for a single scheme, rather than two tiers (a broadly accessible scheme and a separate higher tier scheme). This single scheme could however, encompass farmers working together as part of a wider cluster / catchment area. The new ELMs is likely to be piloted at scale in 2022 and rolled out nationally after that, with smaller testing and trialling of individual elements potentially from this year. Working with NPE, we remain ready to assist Defra with their testing, trialling and pilots.
- 4.3 While we await further progress from Defra, we have been very active with other aspects of our farming work. We are working closely with Natural England to ensure that expiring agri-environment (Higher Level Stewardship) agreements between 2018 and 2024 are renewed to new (Countryside Stewardship) agreements. The aim is to ensure

- that the area of land under agri-environment agreements within the National Park does not decrease while the new ELMs is being developed.
- 4.4 Consideration is also being given to increasing the coverage of farm clusters within the National Park, through the creation of new and the expansion of existing farm clusters. Within the current six South Downs farm clusters, social media channels are being developed to promote this work and to engage the public on farming and conservation issues. Beyond the South Downs, we continue to lead on the co-ordination and development of the Southern Facilitators' Group which comprises facilitators from 14 farm clusters across the south of England to ensure a regional joined-up approach.
- 4.5 The **Heathland Reunited project** is now at the end of the second year of its five year programme of events and activities and two seasons of conservation work have been completed. A full summer programme is now underway which will conclude in September with the main Secrets of the Heath event. Supporting activities will include training for volunteers and workshops for partners and heathland managers. The project will be the main focus for the annual national Heathlands Forum planned for October. We have recruited five site-specific dog ambassadors within the Heathlands Reunited programme who will regularly speak to other dog walkers as they walk their own dogs on the sites.
- 4.6 Our Heritage volunteers are continuing to support the project and will be assisting in the development of stories and leaflets based on their research carried out during the winter months. Work on the heathlands interpretation trail is now well under way. The aim of the trail is to link a number of sites by placing a range of heathland inspired sculptures at key locations. During the coming months the artist will undertake a programme of community engagement workshops which will feed into the design ideas.
- 4.7 The heathlands apprentice scheme is now taking shape and we have a number of partners on board who will be providing placements for the two young people selected. The scheme will run alongside the SDNPA's own apprenticeship scheme.
- 4.8 At the last NPA in March, during a morning workshop, we provided an update on the profile of the 2,010-strong **South Downs National Park Citizens Panel** and the results of the first survey undertaken with panel members in October 2017. Since the last NPA, we have surveyed panel members for a second time and are about to analyse and report on the results.
- 4.9 We are the first National Park to have a Citizens Panel so this is an important innovation as well as an opportunity for us to engage directly with residents. Amongst other things, we plan to utilise the panel to measure awareness of key campaigns or initiatives, the impact of interpretation (signs, leaflets, information boards etc) and the most motivating/eye catching messages to encourage behaviour change.
- 4.10 This is a three year pilot and we will be surveying panel members twice a year in the autumn (early October) and in the spring (April). We will also undertake smaller-scale research on an ad hoc basis with the panel, for example testing the usability of our website to help make information more accessible to the general public.
- 4.11 We now have 4 endorsed **Whole Estate Plans (WEPs)** and a total of 19 estates, farms, rural holdings have been engaged through workshops and site meetings. Several National Parks and AONBs are considering using this model and the Wiston WEP was nominated for a plan making award at the national planning awards.
- 4.12 **A27 at Arundel** - Notice to seek a **Judicial Review** was served on Highways England (HE) in the week beginning 18 June in line with our advice and the SDNPA decision, and the process is continuing with HE having two weeks to respond. Officers continue to be engaged with HE and to take part in scheduled meetings.
- 4.13 **A27 at Lancing and Worthing** – a decision on the scheme was expected within two weeks of 23 May, but at the time of writing no announcement has been made.
- 4.14 **A27 East of Lewes** - We are maintaining a watching brief and have been involved in early discussions about a proposal by ESCC, EBC, WDC and local MPs to develop a new dual carriageway route from east of Lewes to Polegate which goes further north. We will

update Members when there is more information.

5. **Volunteers and Delivery**

- 5.1 Since my last report members of the **Volunteer Ranger Service** carried out 239 practical, promotional and training tasks. At the time of writing, information on 140 of these were confirmed, giving a total of 871 days of volunteer support. It is estimated that this will rise to approximately 1482 overall for the quarter.
- 5.2 The spring saw an increase in tasks relating to the removal of invasive non-native species. There were 63 volunteer days of rhododendron clearance and 54 of Himalayan balsam clearance.
- 5.3 The Western Area team completed their last release of water voles on the River Meon over 8 days in early June with 47 volunteer days covering a variety of tasks. This included 2 activity days for the local West Meon and East Meon schools.
- 5.4 Two VRS Introductory Training days were held in April and June, which saw 20 new volunteer rangers trained from across all areas of the National Park.
- 5.5 34 tasks have been carried out on Access Land, with 14 undertaken on the South Downs Way. Tasks included replacing gates and fences, step building and repairs, vegetation clearance and way marker installation.

6. **Corporate Update**

- 6.1 In terms of the SDNPA's own **income generation** activity, we have already secured £30,000 for the current year, through both the Gatwick Initiative and Southern Water sponsorship of our Chalk Grassland Event. We expect to add to this by securing sponsorship for a number of our other activities, such as our Dark Night Skies Festival and Corporate Volunteering.
- 6.2 Following the successful **Member Days** so far this year we look forward to covering a number of different subjects in the second half of 2018. 30 August will give members an opportunity to visit a range of sites related to the West Sussex Soft Sand Strategy, a review of which is currently being undertaken by the Authority along with West Sussex County Council. This day will seek Members input to inform the future Issues and Options Consultation for Soft Sand in West Sussex. The session on 15 November will be a tour giving Members the opportunity to assess the local impact of grants given by the SDNPA Sustainable Communities Fund.
- 6.3 On Friday 14 September Members, Staff, 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 Adventure Group. If successful, the event may become an annual one, open to the wider public, encouraging our communities to experience the special Health and Wellbeing benefits of getting out and about in the National Park. The National Trail will be broken down into 13 individual legs of varying distance, designed to suit all abilities. They 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. In addition, following Member suggestions, walk leaders will be carrying litter picking equipment and participants will be encouraged to collect litter as they walk – details are given in **Appendix I**.
- 6.4 As in previous years, work on preparing the following year's **budget** begins in late August, when a series of one to one meetings are held with budget holders. The first draft will be discussed in detail at the first Members' Budget Workshop, which will be held on 16 October. Any proposals arising from this will then be costed, and the budget refined in time for the second workshop on 18 December. The budget will then be prepared for approval by the Authority on 28 March 2019.
- 6.5 Work continues on the review of the **Partnership Management Plan (PMP)**. The Member Task & Finish Group and, subsequently, the P&R Committee, have agreed a revised process and timetable which will allow for more Member input and better

engagement with the public.

- 6.6 The focus for this will be the creation at a joint member/officer workshop on 25 September of a Joint Action Plan (shared between the SDNPA and key partners) for 2020-2025. This will set out a small number of Priority Actions which will provide the common thread between the business plans of different organisations. Between the 25 September workshop and one in January 2019 we will use the South Downs Partnership, Parish workshops, farmers' breakfasts, Citizens Panel and other mechanisms to raise awareness of the review and encourage others to make fresh commitments to the PMP. After this, the final Joint Action Plan will be produced and the PMP relaunched for its next five-year phase.
- 6.7 In the meantime, work is ongoing on the strategic reviews for each topic area, with new evidence commissioned on cultural heritage and a report received on the economic profile of the National Park. There have also been a number of useful meetings with external partners including Southern Water and Portsmouth Water, the Coast 2 Capital LEP, the Arts Council, and the Forestry Commission. Last but not least the "Lawton Group" (which comprises the National Trust, Woodland Trust, Wildlife Trusts, and the RSPB) of environmental NGOs is using the review of the PMP as a focus for its work.
- 6.8 Several **Area Office moves** will be taking place this year. The Eastern Area Office is in temporary accommodation at the Sussex Innovation Centre and will be moving into new high quality accommodation in Stanmer Park in August, when refurbishment of the workshop to form office accommodation is complete. The Western Area office is also on a short term lease, which terminates at the end of August. The lease is being finalised on offices and workshop space at Wallops Wood, near Droxford and the Area team will move there during August, with the workshop re-locating from Queen Elizabeth Country Park before the end of the year. Central Area will be moving to well-appointed new offices within the Weald and Downland museum and new accommodation is currently being sought for the Wealden team.
- 6.9 The work of the **Culture Group** is progressing well through meetings, workshops and feedback from Members and staff. Following the 17 May Member/Staff workshop we now have an agreed set of values:
- COLLABORATION: Working together we achieve more
INNOVATION: We encourage and support creativity, learning and adaptability
RESPECT: We value each other and take responsibility for our behaviour
- 6.10 The Group includes two Members (Roger Huxstep and David Coldwell) who can feed in views from the wider membership. It has defined how it wants to see the values demonstrated through behaviours across the whole organisation.
- 6.11 The Group is working on developing a brand to use in publicising the agreed values and behaviours. This will create the platform from which to launch an action plan to develop and embed cultural change. The recent All Staff and Member Event demonstrated our values in action as well as providing the Group with a lot of material to incorporate into the planning which they intend to finalise and present to Members and staff in the autumn.
- 7. News from the Independent South Downs Charitable Trust**
- 7.1 Our partnership with the Trust is progressing well. The "Mend our Way" campaign has now reached 75% of the target, with £80,000 of the £120,000 raised. The Plumpton Plain and Millpond Bottom sections of the route are now fully funded and will be completed over the summer. With a crowd funding appeal planned for September and a number of applications outstanding, the Trust informs me that it is confident of funding all the works by the end of the campaign.
- 7.2 The Trust were also successful in securing funding for a new Apprentice Ranger Programme. This amounts to just under £40,000 spread over the next two years and alongside our own funding will help to recruit 4 new Apprentice Rangers and a supervisor to support them. The Trust informs me that this is a project for which it hopes to find regular support in future.
- 7.3 This has contributed to a strong start to the year, with £70,000 secured and £100,000 in

asks currently outstanding. Members can look forward to hearing more on the Trust's activities in October, when Julie Fawcett, its Chair, will be updating the NPA in person.

8. Media and Communications

- 8.1 As mentioned under paragraph 4.5, we are trialling **dog ambassadors** as part of the Heathlands Reunited programme with the aim of seeing if such a programme could be expanded across the National Park. The recruitment of ambassadors has proved difficult, with many reluctant to take on the role of speaking to other dog walkers. However, we now have five in place and will work with them during the life of the Heathlands Reunited Programme to see if such a system could be rolled out across the National Park. In addition, we are building lists of local veterinary surgeries to target new dog owners, in particular, and will be rolling out an information to them this autumn. We are continuing to liaise with the NFU, the local police officers leading on rural crime, including dog attacks and Sheepwatch. On 22 June we attended the **Sheepwatch conference** in Petersfield, showing our Take the Lead video and materials and discussing further collaboration with the rural crime officers and NFU. We are also working with National Park Partnerships to establish if funding could be found to run a national level Take the Lead campaign across all 15 National Parks, using our Take the Lead as the basis for the campaign.
- 8.2 We have now completed the additional safety checks and production of the **signage** is taking place. The signs will begin to be installed in mid-September and we hope to have all 19 signs in place by early October. We are beginning work to identify the next tranche potential signs with a view to having planning applications submitted by the winter and we are working with a number of parishes on parish signage with the most advanced being Upham which is working with us on templates.
- 8.3 We achieved broadcast coverage across the region for the South Downs Local Plan submission with positive stories running in Sussex, Hampshire and even into Surrey. I gave an interview with BBC South Today, parts of which were used for stories on BBC Southern and South East (TV), BBC Sussex (radio) and BBC Surrey (radio).
- 8.4 Margaret Paren gave interviews with ITV Meridian, BBC South Today and BBC Sussex explaining the SDNPA's decision to call for a judicial review on HE's proposals for the A27 at Arundel. Our media release, including a quote from Margaret, was picked up across our local press.
- 8.5 The announcement of our new apprenticeship programme has received positive coverage across a range of media including an interview with Andrew Lee on BBC Radio Sussex on 20 June.
- 8.6 Our work to promote the Mend our Way campaign continues with SDW Ranger Ben Bessant giving his top tips for walking the South Downs Way on social media tied to National Walking Month. Meanwhile BBC Radio Sussex made the news that the campaign is more than half way to its target their top story for the Breakfast programme on 8 May and joined Andy Gattiker out on the trail to talk about the issues.
- 8.7 In line with this year's objective of seeking out new audiences through our **events programme**, we have already attended the Lord Mayor's Show in Southsea on the first May Bank Holiday weekend and the 'Big Church Day Out' Christian music festival on the second Bank Holiday weekend, both of which achieved our aim of speaking to families who may not have previously been aware of the National Park.
- 8.8 We have also already supported the Community Rail in the City day at London Bridge, The Gilbert White's House Nature Day, Wests Wood Fair and Winchester Criterion, where we sponsored a Family Bike Ride with over 400 participants.

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 26 April 2018 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.

TREVOR BEATTIE

Chief Executive Officer

South Downs National Park Authority

Contact Officer:	Trevor Beattie
Tel:	01730 819313
email:	trevor.beattie@southdowns.gov.uk
Appendices	I. Way in a Day Information Sheet
SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive; Director of Strategy & Partnerships; Director of Planning; Director of Corporate Services; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services, Business Service Manager
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	N/A

