

Agenda Item 8
Report NPA26/18

Report to	South Downs National Park Authority
Date	16 October 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 since my last report to the 3 July 2018 NPA.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The summer has seen a number of important government announcements, together with one that was promised but failed to materialise - the metrics for measuring progress against the 25 Year Plan for the Environment. These are essential to address the criticism that the ambitious Plan lacks timescale or targets. We know, however, that the Secretary of State has asked for weekly briefings on the delivery of the Plan and we are working with National Parks England (NPE) to report progress to ensure that National Parks are part of the narrative about successful delivery.
- 2.2 On 30 July the Commons **Environmental Audit Committee** published its report into the 25 Year Plan which referenced NPE's evidence in a number of places, particularly its emphasis on the need for cross departmental buy-in and support. One of its key recommendations is that "Government needs urgently to bring forward details on targets, implementation, governance and funding before the publication of the draft Environmental Principles and Governance Bill. Legislation will be required to implement the Plan's key proposals and to ensure it has a lasting impact. Government departments other than DEFRA need to embrace the Plan's ambitions and integrate them into their decision making." The consultation on this Bill, which will establish an independent environmental watchdog, was launched in May and its publication is expected in the autumn.
- 2.3 On the same day the Government published the draft revised **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**. Again there was evidence that the National Park case has been heard, with the new Framework stating that "great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues." The reference to "enhancing" is a most welcome new addition, as is the promotion of planning as a way of achieving net gains for the environment and the recognition that the policies and decisions should encourage multiple benefits. An accompanying 'Housing and economic land availability assessment' makes clear that the new Housing Delivery Test set out in the NPPF does not apply to National Park Authorities, although we still have to do all we can to provide homes within landscape constraints.

- 2.4 On 23 August the Government published its first batch of technical papers on preparing for a **Brexit no deal scenario**. These included papers on “Farm Payments if there’s no Brexit deal” and “Receiving Rural Development Funding if there’s no Brexit deal”. There was not much that was new – each paper was less than three sides of A4 with some repetition – but there was welcome confirmation that if the UK leaves the EU with no deal farmers will continue to receive payments under the terms of the UK’s funding guarantee. There would be domestic legislation that requires beneficiaries to conform to the same standards as currently until a new system can be put in place.
- 2.5 On 12 September Government published its **Agriculture Bill**, the enabling Bill which sets the direction for the UK’s future Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS). The Bill currently lacks detail (particularly on rural development) but elaborates the theme of public payments for public goods including:
- Improving air and water quality.
 - Providing habitats for wildlife.
 - Reducing flood risk.
 - Improving public access
 - Protecting iconic / culture features.
- The inclusion of access is particularly welcome. A seven year transition period is envisaged and the initial top slicing of the current basic payment scheme is expected to yield around £150m to support pilots. There is, however, no indication of how devolved the process for delivery will be and by extension the potential role for NPAs. There is also no indication that there will be a more integrated approach between ELMS and wider rural development policy and funding, and no reference to landscape. Defra followed up the publication of the Bill with a supporting Policy Document and a summary of the responses received to their “Health and Harmony” consultation. To advise on future test, trials and pilots Defra has set up an Environmental Land Management Programme Board which will meet monthly and includes a wide range of stakeholders. NPE has a seat.
- 2.6 Early indications show that farmers working collaboratively at a landscape scale will be a key element of the new system which is planned to be fully in place in 2027, with a series of tests, trials and pilots between 2019 and 2024 and the phasing out of Direct Payments between 2021 and 2027. With our “Farming the Future: South Downs National Park Pilot Scheme” proposals and six farm cluster groups covering approximately two-thirds of the National Park, this places the South Downs in a very strong position to support Defra with these tests, trials and pilots but we need to maintain the pressure to ensure that the new systems allow for as much regional and landscape flexibility as possible.
- 2.7 We have also been working closely with Natural England (NE) on their **agri-environment scheme** pipelining process. This involves identifying which Environmental Stewardship (ES) agreements that are expiring over 2019 will be invited to apply for Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship (CS) commencing in January 2020. SDNPA area teams are in the process of identifying those ES agreements where it is considered that Higher Tier schemes are required for specialist habitats and protected sites, and where staff can help to inform and deliver scheme options. Landowners and farmers who have expiring ES agreements which may not be suitable for Higher Tier CS will be supported to enter into Mid-Tier CS. The pipelining process continues throughout the autumn, and we will use this as an opportunity to refine the partnership approach with NE for future years when the number of expiring ES agreements in the South Downs increases.
- 2.8 In August ‘**Meet the Farmer**’ plaques were attached to posts along the South Downs Way (SDW) between the rivers Arun and Adur. The idea was conceived by the Arun to Adur Farm Cluster Group to enable trail users to learn more about the land around them and who farms it. Users are able to tap their mobile phone on one of six plaques so a video automatically opens on You Tube. The videos allow farmers to introduce themselves and provide details of how they manage the surrounding farmland. They have been very well received and we plan to expand this project along other stretches of the SDW.

- 2.9 In addition to the collective social media accounts, the SDNPA is leading on the development of **South Downs Farming**, a new website for all Farm Clusters in the National Park. Allowing each cluster group to add and update their own content and promote the work they are doing, we aim to have the site up and running by the end of the financial year.
3. **Planning**
- 3.1 The **South Downs Local Plan** is at examination and there will be three weeks of public hearings. The first week of hearings will be held at the South Downs Centre from Tuesday 13 November to Thursday 15 November and will focus on legal and strategic matters. The matters and issues for the second and third weeks will be confirmed at the end of October and will focus on non-strategic issues, development management, specific settlements and individual sites. The second week of hearings will be held at the South Downs Centre from Tuesday 4 December to Thursday 6 December and the third week at the Keep in Brighton from Tuesday 11 December to Thursday 13 December. Members welcome to attend all of the Local Plan Hearings.
- 3.2 The **Lewes Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP)** is currently at examination. The final Examiner's report is due at the end of October and the Referendum is likely to be held in January 2019.
- 3.3 Members will recall that in July the Authority approved our strategy for **increasing affordable housing** provision, a key component of which is an SDNPA grant of up to £30,000 for each affordable dwelling where it is provided in perpetuity. This is funded from financial contributions developers have paid through Section 106 legal obligations. The announcement of this grant scheme received wide publicity locally, has been well received by our partners and has added extra impetus to efforts to deliver affordable housing in the National Park. Our planning team are currently offering pre-application advice for affordable housing schemes on some 20 sites, some of which will prove to be speculative but others do have potential for affordable housing development. I will alert Members when we award our first grants.
- 3.4 Under the auspices of the Rural Housing Network, which I co-chair, I am pleased to say that SDNPA staff have recently led on assembling a pilot proposal for a **Revolving Rural Land Bank (RRLB)**. This follows the commitment in the Government's 25 Year Plan for the Environment to pilot such a concept (which has had some success in Scotland). The RRLB would focus on delivering affordable housing and aims to acquire more difficult sites and to bring them forward for development much more quickly than is currently the case. After a one-off set up grant from the Government the RRLB would become self-financing as sales receipts are invested back into the fund. Our proposal has only recently been submitted to Government but senior civil servants are positively engaged. We will see whether we are ultimately successful but I am pleased with the quality of the proposal that we have assembled in short order and that we are at the cutting edge of innovation and implementation on this topic.
4. **Progress of Existing Projects**
- 4.1 The final installation and services checks are now being completed for the **entry signage pilot** and the 19 signs will be installed between 22 October and 21 December. Licensing agreements with the various Highways Authorities are being reviewed by legal and we are maintaining the pressure on them to reduce roadside clutter. We are also drawing up a maintenance plan to come into effect once the signs have been installed.
- 4.2 We are planning a media launch of the first sign. This is likely to be in West Sussex, but we must await the final services searches before we can confirm the exact order of installation.
- 4.3 Having appointed an **Apprentice Co-ordinator** in July, I am pleased to report that we now have 6 apprentices working within the SDNPA. Our planning apprentice is starting his second year and we have five new recruits: three are undertaking an Environmental Conservation Apprenticeship with Sparsholt College with placements in the Heathlands Reunited team and the area teams across the Park: we have a Digital Marketing Apprentice working with the Communications team and a Business Admin apprentice

working in support roles across the SDNPA. They, and the planning apprentice, are attending Chichester College one day per week.

- 4.4 This Autumn 20 Pets at Home stores in and around the National Park will be stocking our newly revamped **Take the Lead leaflets** in their counter stands. Over the coming months we will focus on developing Take the Lead in our heathland areas as part of Heathlands Reunited. Our survey showed that 78% of people who use heathlands are dog walkers and so these are important focus areas. We will be undertaking onsite surveys to set a baseline around dog behaviour, followed by proactive promotion of the Take the Lead messages on those sites and follow up surveys to measure what changes in behaviour have occurred.

5. **Volunteers and Delivery**

- 5.1 Since my last report, officers in the volunteering team have moved the storage of volunteering information from the old access database to a new system called 'Better Impact'. The volunteers' information has already been moved over to the new system and the volunteering team have been working closely with each area team to ensure task reporting is set-up correctly for the next quarter and that all staff are trained in how to use the system. Due to this change over, there are currently no firm volunteering figures to report for July to September, however, it is estimated that 209 task days will be carried out in Q2, with an estimated total of 1150 days of volunteer support.
- 5.2 The new system is already being successfully used in other National Parks across the country and once fully up and running for the SDNPA it will deliver much more accurate figures for volunteer reporting.

6. **Corporate Update**

- 6.1 On 14 September a group of staff, volunteers and Members achieved the challenge of collectively walking the entire South Downs Way, raising money for our "**Mend our Way**" appeal. There were over 100 taking part, either Walking, Cycling, Running or Horse Riding their leg. The event was blessed by good weather and we received a warm reception from participants and spectators alike, encouraging a number of spontaneous donations from passers-by. This was a pilot to explore the potential of an annual South Downs Way celebration, with the aim of opening this out to local employers. A short video of the event has been prepared which Members will have a chance to view at the workshop that precedes the NPA.
- 6.2 Since my last report, there was a successful **Partnership Management Plan (PMP) Workshop** delivered on 25 September, attended by around 60 people, a mixture of Partners, Members and staff. The output from the workshop is being used to inform consultation with key stakeholders and partners and to gain firm commitments from them about what they will deliver in support of the revised PMP for 2020-2025.
- 6.3 A communications plan for the PMP review has been approved by the PMP Task and Finish Group which sets out the approach to public engagement. It includes, a "PMP at a glance" booklet, revised website content, media releases, information in the October eNewsletter and information in Downland Thymes and South Downs View. There will also be engagement with communities through town and Parish Councils.
- 6.4 There will be a further day-long workshop for Members and partners on 24 January, which will aim to agree a draft revised joint action plan for the next 5 years.
- 6.5 The **Corporate Plan for 2018-19** has been published. It forms a main component of the 'golden thread' linking the high level vision and outcomes from the PMP to SDNPA by setting corporate priorities, which are then reflected in team plans and the individual objectives of all members of staff.
- 6.6 The new compact format is the template for the proposed 5 year plan that will be produced to coincide with the refreshed PMP and new joint action plan from 2020-25. It is divided into key priorities, projects and core work priorities. The measures are fewer and more easily tracked. Progress against the priorities in the plan are reported regularly to P&R Committee.

6.7 Eastern Area

The Stanmer office has now been successfully relocated to the Stanmer workshop with the area team having started work there on Monday 17 September. We have also been in discussion with B&HCC and Savills, (acting on behalf of B&HCC), regarding the possibility of SDNPA being a potential tenant (possibly an anchor tenant) post refurbishment of the Long Barn at Stanmer. B&HCC have indicated that the work will take about 5 years and will almost certainly be phased with the Long Barn refurbishment in the first phase. We are working with the project architect, Eastern Area Team and SDW team to obtain their requirements so they can be incorporated into the design.

6.8 Central Area

We are currently awaiting the outcome of the Planning application to amend a condition that currently only allows the Landport building at the Weald and Downland Museum to be used for Museum purposes. If this is approved Facilities and IT can begin planning to move the office in November.

6.9 Wealden Heath Area

Following a tender process and a meeting with the National Trust we are the preferred partner to occupy Heathbarn Farm on the A272 just outside Midhurst and are looking to arrange a meeting to discuss the details of the lease terms in the next few weeks. We propose to pay for the refurbishment works upfront but take a proportional reduction to the rent for the 20/25 year period of the lease. We will therefore need to access funds from the Estates reserve. The National Trust are keen to get work underway as soon as possible and we are aiming for the work to be completed by Summer 2019. We will use the South Downs Centre as a basis for the standard of works we require.

6.10 Western Area

The office moved to Wallops Wood near Droxford on 1 August. The facilities at the yard at QECP will be moved in October and will include space for the volunteers to meet, as well as a kitchenette, shower and meeting room. The leases at Wallops Wood are for 5 years to allow time to find a permanent home for the team.

6.11 The **Culture Group** worked closely with staff and Members to identify three values for the SDNPA: *Respect, Innovation and Collaboration*. The Culture Group are working on the communication and publication of the agreed values and have identified key work streams to support further work on developing and embedding these values into the fabric of the organisation. Cards outlining the values have been distributed to all staff and Members.

6.12 Our **new e-learning system, ELMS**, has proven to be a valuable and effective training tool and all staff have now completed 7 mandatory training courses, including health and safety, GDPR, equality and diversity and cyber security. 11 out of the 15 other National Parks are now also using ELMS enabling us to share knowledge and learning across the family. We are using the system to create a new National Park induction programme, which will be available to all NPA staff by the end of the year. Members now have full access to all courses and are notified of new ones through the monthly bulletin.

7. **Media and Communications**

7.1 Our **Public Affairs work** is progressing and as agreed at the July NPA, we have produced a card with the key public affairs 'asks', for Members and staff to use as an aide memoire as they meet and work with partners and stakeholders.

7.2 The circulation of our **National Park newsletter** continues to increase and in September it was sent out to 4,226 people. We have an average of 37% of subscribers opening it and around 11% clicking through to links within it – well above the industry average of 22% and 2.4%.

7.3 We launched the second of our mini-wildlife documentaries in July ahead of our new Wild Chalk event. Made by Blue Wave (the people behind the BBC 4 'England's Mountains Green' documentary) it focused on chalk grassland species and has now been viewed 39,000 times on Facebook. Over the summer we have been using short clips from the film to share across our social media every week which have received a total of 8,400 views on Facebook, 1,900 views on Instagram and 1,400 on twitter.

- 7.4 We have received excellent coverage for our media release on the latest successful projects to receive Sustainable Communities Fund grants including a piece highlighting Butser Ancient Farm's mosaic in Petersfield Post, Stedham campsite in the Midhurst Observer, Railway Land Trust in the Sussex Express and Butterfly Conservation and Lancing College's Elms for Adur project in the Shoreham Herald.
- 7.5 Other media highlights over the summer have included promotion for our summer events (in particular Secrets of the Heath and the new Wild Chalk event), success stories from our annual review, promoting the visit by Julian Glover, and launching our 2018-19 photo competition.
- 7.6 This summer our **events** attendance has been in line with our revised strategy, targeted towards those demographic groups that our evidence shows are least aware of the National Park. With limited resources this has been at the expense of some of the more traditional farming/ countryside events including the South of England Show, Findon Sheep Fair and the Alresford Show.
- 7.7 During July we achieved excellent engagement at the Southampton Mela, an Asian food and music festival, followed by some intense activity over National Parks Week. We launched the week with a new event in East Brighton Park called 'Wild Chalk' which was delivered through partnering with BHCC and Southern Water (who provided £10,000 in sponsorship). The event exceeded our expectations with over 1,000 local people attending to learn more about the importance of chalk downland both in terms of biodiversity and water storage. During the following week we visited Crawley Town Centre, Southsea Seafront, and Worthing Shopping Centre with the events van and a suite of activities including a giant colouring wall. At these events, families could sign up for free public transport to visit the National Park for some ranger led activities the following week.
- 7.8 During August our focus was on Boomtown Festival, which we attended with a customised colouring wall and a mini cinema showing short films of local habitats. Over the four days of the event we had meaningful conversations with 1,283 young people from all over the country.
- 7.9 We have also continued to support smaller shows and events including the Dog Fun Day we run in partnership with the National Trust, MADhurst, Herstmonceux Astrofest, Langhams Open Day, West Grinstead and Laughton Ploughing Matches, and continued our seafront attendance at Brighton and Eastbourne.
- 7.10 Secrets of the Heath, now run by the Heathlands Reunited team, rounded off the main events season with another very successful weekend on Petersfield Heath, attracting over 3,000 people.
- 7.11 Final engagement figures have yet to be finalised but are likely to exceed 10,000, with several hundred new sign ups to the Newsletter being achieved through the electronic subscription facility on the new Events Van.
- 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 3 July 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: None

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

