

Agenda Item 9
Report NPA35/18

Report to	South Downs National Park Authority
Date	18 December 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 16 October 2018 NPA.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The period since the last NPA has been an extremely busy one for the Authority with the Local Plan examination, the review of the Partnership Management Plan, the response to the Glover Review, the new budget round and the parish workshops all delivered alongside a high caseload on development management and neighbourhood planning. I am pleased to be able to report that the Authority has managed this peak in workload very well. Members will have a chance to review of some of the results later in today's agenda.

3. Planning

- 3.1 The first three days of **SDNPA Local Plan hearings** have taken place and went well. We discussed legal compliance and the development strategy on the first day when the Inspector focussed on the duty to cooperate and unmet housing need. The hearing on the second day focused entirely on overall housing need and supply and the third day was employment land. There was a break of two weeks followed by hearings in Midhurst and then Falmer, when the Inspector focused on sites and settlements.
- 3.2 The big **neighbourhood planning** news in the National Park is that we have received the initial Inspector's report on Lewes Neighbourhood Development Plan for fact checking. The independent examiner stated that the Plan 'seeks to bring forward positive and sustainable development in the neighbourhood area' and 'it is clear that all sections of the community have been engaged in its preparation.' Planning Committee will consider the Plan in January and there will be a referendum in March. The Stedham and Iping plan is currently out for consultation.

4. Progress of Existing Projects

- 4.1 Following the announcement by Highways England (HE) of the fresh consultation on the **A27 at Arundel**, Tim Burr and Alun Aylesbury attended the first elected members' meeting which was convened to keep the local communities up to date with developments. Consultation is likely to take place after the May 19 elections and Members will be invited to a workshop in March to consider the implications of the proposals in advance. Papers will be coming to Policy and Resources Committee and the NPA in time for submission to HE in their consultation period, dates yet to be announced. We are also working with Natural England (national landscape team),

Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Sussex Wildlife Trust and the Arun Vision group to look at the impacts of the scheme and to assess the opportunities for mitigation and compensation.

- 4.2 On the **other sections of the A27**, plans are advanced for extending the Non-Motorised User route east of Lewes and we have been working with HE to consider decluttering, dark night skies and junction design at Wilmington and Drusillas. We have no further information on the Worthing-Lancing scheme since the proposals are still with Department for Transport Ministers for consideration, and nothing further has been heard about the Chichester scheme.
- 4.3 For the **M3 Junction 9** scheme at Winchester we are working with partners to develop a landscape enhancement initiative which is being used to develop mitigation and compensatory initiatives. This has been welcomed by HE though there is work to be done to see what is achievable and can be linked to the scheme. In parallel we are engaged with a separate part of HE which is delivering the M3 smart motorway scheme and is looking favourably on our proposal for a green bridge at Twyford Down to re-connect St Catherines Hill to the South Downs.
- 4.4 With regard to **other infrastructure**, we have commented on the latest consultations on the Gatwick Airport master plan and Southampton Airport expansion, both of which fail to mention the impacts on the South Downs, New Forest and AONBs which are overflowed. We have recently responded to the Statutory Consultation and Scoping Report for the Esso pipeline and the application for a Development Consent Order is expected in the New Year. In terms of undergrounding low voltage electricity cables, there are schemes from EDF at Charleston & Selmeaton, Firle Beacon, Litlington, Malling Hill, Arun Valley, and Piddinghoe.
- 4.5 The new **South Downs Way** end marker at Eastbourne has been reinstalled in its correct position following a contractor error and the marker now has new shared identity finger posts alongside to create a real sense of arrival / departure. The new fingers gives distances to Jevington, Wilmington, Beachy Head and Winchester.
- 4.6 The long awaited **England Coast path** creation report for the stretch between Eastbourne and Shoreham has been published. The consultation ended on 22 November. All representations and objections received by NE will now be sent to the Secretary of State. We are not expecting any significant objections on the stretch within the National Park.
- 4.7 After 3 months of work with our teams, our new **apprentices** have demonstrated excellent development during their first review visit from their tutors. All of them have a clear understanding of the course requirements and have started to work on their chosen units, supported by our teams. Some funds have also been used to purchase extra courses and workshops that will benefit their development.
- 4.8 We have attended our first careers fair at the Midhurst Rother College where we had the opportunity to share our apprenticeship programme with 6th form students, presenting an alternative pathway into attaining a qualification other than university. We also took this opportunity to showcase the work done by the National Park and the apprentice's contribution on the different projects they have been involved with.
- 4.9 Initial meetings have taken place with project partners where some of our apprentices will spend some time on placements, starting in January.

5. Volunteers and Delivery

- 5.1 Since my last report, **the volunteering team** have been working closely with the area teams to make sure the Q2 data has been added to the new 'Better Impact' system. Most of this data has now been inputted although there are still some gaps.
- 5.2 In my previous report it was estimated that there would be 209 task days carried out in Q2, with an estimated total of 1150 days of volunteer support. After running the actual figures, there were 266 task days in Q2, with a total of 803 days of volunteer support. With the missing task reports inputted, we estimate that this will rise to 1135 days of volunteer support. These figures are slightly lower than normal as several task days were

- cancelled due to the unusually hot summer conditions.
- 5.3 Another VRS introductory training day was held in September which saw 9 new volunteers trained from across all areas of the National Park.
 - 5.4 Invasive species continued to be tackled with ragwort, Himalayan balsam and rhododendron clearance tasks being undertaken Park-wide.
 - 5.5 250 volunteer days were delivered with partner organisations, either under their supervision or on their sites. That is a basic added financial value (using the Heritage Lottery Fund volunteer costing tool) of £12,000, without considering the input of semi-skilled or professional volunteers using machinery and other skills and knowledge related to the activity.
- 6. Corporate Update**
- 6.1 Since my last report, we still await news from Defra on **‘Farming the Future: South Downs National Park Pilot Scheme’** as part of the development of a new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS). Defra has now received 115 proposals, and those that test critical elements of a new scheme, or provide a mechanism for testing (such as through farm cluster groups), are likely to be prioritised. The Department has indicated that it will respond to all submissions in December.
 - 6.2 In the meantime, we are working closely with Natural England on its **agri-environment pipeline**. In late November, permission was granted to offer extensions to landowners in Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) schemes expiring in 2019, as long as no amendments are required. Where agreed, extensions will last for four years, with expiring HLS agreements requiring amendments needing to apply for Countryside Stewardship. Area Ranger Teams have provided local information on the delivery of current HLS schemes to help inform the process.
 - 6.3 In November, the SDNPA hosted the third meeting of the **Southern Facilitators’ Group**, comprising 14 farm clusters across southern England. It was agreed that there may be scope to coordinate proposals between clusters both in the National Park and the wider area once more is known on what proposals Defra wish to take forward. One possibility would be to test the new collaboration module in the *Land App*, which will enable cluster group facilitators to plan environmental delivery across the whole of their project area.
 - 6.4 The **South Downs Farm Cluster Network** social media accounts continue to grow. Following a suggestion from the Eastern Downs Farmer Group organised and led by our Communications Team, a trial ‘farmer take-over’ of the South Downs National Park Authority’s Twitter and Instagram accounts is being planned for Friday 7th December. Two farmers will take-over the accounts for the day explaining the work that they do on their farms to produce food and care for the environment. The aim is to provide a way for farmers in the South Downs to showcase and explain their work to the wider public. If the trial is successful, we plan to work with all farm clusters in the National Park on similar seasonal events.
 - 6.5 We are working with an NPE officer group to develop a proposal for a **rural growth deal** to cover English national parks. This would give NPAs a role in shaping the delivery of all the measures and funding streams, which will replace EU funding for rural development such as LEADER and EAFRD, and would complement the existing NPE ask on the new Land Management Scheme.
 - 6.6 **Green infrastructure** is defined as “a network of multifunctional green and blue space, urban and rural which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits to local communities”. The work on South Downs green infrastructure started in 2014 through the production of a GI Framework, conceived as a strategic approach across the National Park and all of the overlapping local authority areas. Whilst the Framework, an evidenced based approach, was completed it was not formally adopted or launched at the time due to further negotiation with partners and the need to concentrate on the Local Plan policies.

- 6.7 Looking ahead we are preparing:
- Publish the Green Infrastructure Framework on the website following a refresh to ensure references are up to date including the 25 Year Environment Plan and to the SDNPA Local Plan.
 - Create a communications approach which will help to identify the key audiences and develop a dialogue for delivery. The aspiration is to engage wider than the planning system, ensure a joined up approach internally across our natural capital/ ecosystem services and green infrastructure work, and also learn from others such as the Green Halo initiative in Hampshire.
 - Continue to build on and use the existing evidence which will inform mechanisms such as neighbourhood planning. This will take place alongside the dissemination of guidance on green infrastructure and ecosystem services to partners, stakeholders and communities.
- 6.8 Delivery throughout the framework area will be achieved by identification of projects and pilot strategies - such as the Winchester Landscape Study - which develop the approach in identified targeted areas.
- 6.9 To embed this work across the Authority we are establishing an internal cross-departmental officer group for the Natural Capital Network to support the embedding of natural capital and ecosystems service in all our strategies.
- 7. Lessons from other National Parks**
- 7.1 All National Parks are required to produce a management plan, and these are very different in their focus, levels of detail and accessibility. During the process of reviewing our own **Partnership Management Plan (PMP)**, we have looked at any key learning that we can take from how they have approached the task.
- 7.2 Keeping it simple is a good lesson to learn. A number of Parks have taken the trouble to produce succinct summaries of their plans which make what can be very complex documents easier to understand. The Cairngorms have produced a very engaging example. We can also learn from those National Parks that have made their plans accessible as web pages as well as a PDF document with lots of pictures. This makes the plan easier to navigate allowing people to find the sections they are interested in more easily.
- 7.3 All plans have a range of ambitions, outcomes, objectives and aims. These terms are not used particularly consistently. The “keep it simple lesson” is also relevant here, as most group these under the purposes and duty that are relevant in their country. In England all plans are grouped in some way around the two purposes and the duty for English National Parks. The PMP Member Task and Finish Group will be applying the lessons as it produces the revised plan.
- 7.4 Over the past few months I have been working with Alison Barnes, the CEO of the **New Forest**, to examine the scope for closer collaboration and shared services between our two National Parks. The first outcome of our agreement has been discussions about a one year trial of shared services in HR under which our own team will provide support and advice to the New Forest. This will avoid duplication and increase the resources and expertise available to both teams. We are also developing a combined response to the current Hampshire County Council consultation on their vision for the county in 2050 and are jointly commissioning work on green infrastructure.
- 7.5 This collaborative approach mirrors the UK wide sharing between NPAs that SDNPA has championed through the **NPUK “Working Together”** initiative which has already generated considerable savings, as well as a seamless route for the exchange of best practice between National Parks in our ELMS e-learning portal which has now been adopted by 11 authorities. The importance of such linkages between NPAs will be emphasised in our response to the Glover Review that is for discussion elsewhere on the agenda, as will the need for us to work more closely with our local family of AONBs.
- 7.6 With this in mind I attended the annual “Landscapes for Life” **conference of AONBs** in London at the end of November. It was clear that we have a strong shared agenda with

the AONBs and that they are keen to work with us to develop sub-regional landscape led partnerships. This presents an exciting vision for the future of National Parks as the best places for nature, connected through wildlife and landscape corridors to each other and to the surrounding AONBs to enhance the environment, improve biodiversity and increase resilience to climate change.

8. Media and Communications

- 8.1 In October we announced that work is beginning on developing priorities for the National Park through the Partnership Management Plan. We continue to grow our presence on social media using interesting and targeted content such as our wildlife films and a recent Armistice day partnership with local composer and animator. As of 27 November we had 9,318 followers on Facebook (a 29% increase from 7,211 followers on 1 April) and 11,069 followers on Twitter (a 9% increase over the same period).
- 8.2 Media highlights over the past two months have included coverage of the Partnership Management Plan, the new flock of sheep at Mill Hill Local Nature Reserve, the new Miles without Stiles disabled access route supported with funding from Gatwick, the withdrawal of our request for a judicial review on Highways England's proposal for the A27 bypass at Arundel and the South Downs Trust's visitor giving scheme following a successful pilot with Deans Place Hotel.
- 8.3 On 1 November we featured in five separate stories in one edition of the Midhurst Observer, namely a positive piece trailing plans for the Heathland Reunited sculpture trail ahead of the planning pre-app submission; a piece about the Battle of Boar's Head music and animation ahead of the 100th anniversary of the Armistice; a review of our recent exhibition of plans for the next stage of the Centurion way to Cocking; our media release about the Heathland Forum event highlighting a training exercise with West Sussex Fire & Rescue; and a short piece about the new Miles without Stiles routes launched thanks to support from Gatwick.

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 16 October 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

