



**South Downs**

National Park Authority

**Agenda Item 14**

**Report PR24/19**

Report to	<b>Policy &amp; Resources Committee</b>
Date	<b>6 June 2019</b>
By	<b>Communications &amp; Engagement Manager</b>
Title of Report <b>Note</b>	<b>Parish Engagement</b>

**Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to note the proposed engagement methods set out in Section 4.**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The South Downs has a population of 117,000 people, more than any other National Park, spread over three counties, 15 different local authorities and represented by 176 parish or town councils.
- 1.2 Over the ten years of operation our engagement with our parishes has changed as we have focused on various key moments and pieces of work. The early stages after designation involved substantial consultation as we sought to work with our communities to establish the special qualities of the National Park and to ensure their feedback as we began development of our first Partnership Management Plan.
- 1.3 As we have matured as an organisation and entered new phases of focus, our engagement with our parishes has changed. The last few years have seen a focus on engaging our parishes and communities in the development of the first Local Plan for the entire National Park. As our Local Plan nears completion it seems fitting to review how and when we engage our parishes in the next phase.
- 1.4 This paper focuses exclusively on how we engage with our parishes – i.e., the parish or town councils, which contributes to our statutory obligation to inform and consult parish councils<sup>1</sup>, and not with the wider communities.

## **2. Current communication with our parishes**

- 2.1 Our six parish Members are the main conduit for contact with our parishes, while our Communities Lead is the first point of contact among Officers for parishes and our ranger teams have lots of day-to-day and project specific interactions with our parishes.
- 2.2 We currently hold biannual parish workshops in each of the three counties, open to all of the parishes in that county with land inside the National Park
- 2.3 We currently send our monthly newsletter through our Communities Lead to all of the parish clerks for distribution to their parish representatives.

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<sup>1</sup> section 63(5) and Schedule 7 paragraph 16 Environment Act 1995

## Raising our profile in local media

- 2.4 We have increased our focus on telling the local, project based stories through print, radio and TV media across the National Park. Since January 2019 to date, the South Downs National Park was mentioned 1,267 in the media with a combined audience reach of 21 million people. Our increased proactive media work saw greater coverage in our local and regional media which now covers the length and breadth of the National Park. The coverage includes a range of stories on local projects and conservation work, core themes such as mental health and well-being, and core public affairs topics set out in the Public Affairs Strategy such as water.
- 2.5 We are reaching new audiences in places such as Southampton with the Daily Echo covering its first story in years on the return of otters to the National Park. Areas on the edge of the National Park, such as Farnham, are also now including stories on the National Park.
- 2.6 Since January we have had 94 hits in the Midhurst Observer, 51 in the Petersfield Post, 40 in the West Sussex County Times, 35 in the Sussex Observer series in the Sussex Express, 29 in the Portsmouth News, 26 in the Brighton Argus and 26 in the Hampshire Chronicle.

## **3. How should we communicate with our parishes going forward**

- 3.1 To begin to think about how we should communicate with and engage with our parishes going forward, we have assessed how we have communicated with them over the last ten years – what has worked and what hasn't – and also looked at what the focus of our engagement should be over the coming years. This has involved the Communities Lead, the Events & Engagement Officer, who have both been involved from the beginning, using their knowledge to suggest the best way forward.
- 3.2 It was agreed that the proposals needed to create a positive and proactive two-way communication system with parishes that was achievable given the large number of parish councils and meetings, the wide geographic spread and the lean operating model of the Authority. It was agreed the key was to deliver what we promise and do it well rather than trying to create dozens of initiatives that could not be sustained.
- 3.3 With both the Local Plan and the Partnership Management Plan nearing completion, now seemed the opportune time to look at how we should communicate with our parishes going forward. This involved identifying and assessing a wide range of suggestions, from Members and officers and looking at what other National Parks do.
- 3.4 Due to Parish elections we were unfortunately not able to discuss the details of this paper in detail with our parish Members at this time. The intention is that we will liaise and work closely with our newly elected parish Members as soon as all six are in place.

## **4. Proposals for future engagement**

- 4.1 We have developed a number of approaches for future engagement with our parishes. Our six Parish Members will play a crucial role in developing and delivering our engagement with the parishes.
- 4.2 **Reinvigorate parish workshops:** Organisation and management of future workshops would be done by the Communities Lead and Events & Engagement Officer working together and with the SDNPA Parish Members and the Director of Countryside Policy & Management to plan a proactive programme of engagement that covered a wider range of topics. This would include liaising with the associations of parish councils at county level to establish what 'hot topics' parishes wanted to cover.
- 4.3 **Parish newsletters:** To increase our profile and create a better understanding of our work and the key issues affecting the National Park, we propose to compile a list of parish newsletters and publications. We would then draft a monthly piece from the Chief Executive covering what is happening in the National Park and what is coming up. For parish newsletters that come out quarterly, we would amalgamate the monthly pieces into one quarterly piece. For those shorter, one page newsletters that do not have much space, we would draft a short list of bullets.

- 4.4 **Parish AGMs:** We frequently get requests for someone from the Authority to attend annual parish AGMs. This is a proactive and positive way in which we can engage our parishes, but which is inconsistent across the National Park. We propose a one-year pilot whereby an annual set presentation is created for delivery at parish AGMs. A pool of speakers would be developed for each county and managed by the Communities Lead and Events & Engagement Officer.. The core of this pool of speakers would be the six parish Members, with a range of officers also being available.
- 4.5 **Monthly newsletter:** We will continue to distribute and push our monthly enewsletter through the Parish clerks and promote direct sign up to the enewsletter at parish meetings and through our parish Members.
- 4.6 **Media coverage:** We will continue to push our stories to media outlets across and around the National Park, focusing on the key issues and local stories.
- 4.7 **Making better use of parish meetings:** We will look to coordinate our work with and announcements to parishes to coincide with their parish meetings. Examples include the awarding of grassroots funds, SCF grants and neighbourhood planning.
- 4.8 **Parish signage:** We will look to work alongside a group of case study communities to develop parish signage as part of a wider Communities of the South Downs project which will be brought to NPA in July 2019.

## 5. Next steps

- 5.1 We would work closely with the SDNPA Parish Members to deliver the above programme of engagement with our parishes.

## 6. Other Implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	The proposal requires people resource and will be dependent on the strong involvement of all six Parish Members.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	The proposal focuses on making better use of the resources and expertise we already have.
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?	Yes. The variety of methods used to communicate with parishes are designed to ensure information is accessible to all. Information can be provided in alternative formats or languages if required.
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?	The proposal will involve some lone working of Members and officer but would be covered by the lone working policy.
Are there any Data Protection implications?	List of parish newsletter contacts would be compiled with the permission of the individuals involved and would be stored in accordance with our data protection guidelines.
Are there any Sustainability implications based on the 5 principles set out in the SDNPA Sustainability Strategy?	No

## 7. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Attendance at AGMs could be resource intensive	Unlikely if led by Parish Members and includes a suitable pool of officers	Communities Lead becomes overloaded with parish meetings.  Parishes become unhappy if promised level of interaction is not delivered.	Close liaison and agreement with members at an early stage and a pool of Parish Members and officers established.

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Appendices None  
SDNPA Consultees Chief Executive; Director of Countryside Policy and Management; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services, Business Service Manager  
External Consultees None  
Background Documents None