

Report to	South Downs National Park Authority
Date	1 October 2019
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 report to the 2 July 2019 NPA.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The summer which began with the adoption of our first Local Plan has seen levels of activity which are much higher than usual for the season. There has been no perceptible summer lull. We have run three workshops on the Local Plan for members of partner authorities and a similar number for their staff. Our events programme has been busier and more outward looking than in previous years, as described later in this report. The Seven Sisters project board has held its first two meetings and we have delivered a number of initiatives to celebrate the 70th anniversary of National Parks. We have prepared a response to several major consultations, launched our new ranger experiences and been heavily involved in the work of National Parks England and National Parks Partnerships.

- 2.2 Recent frantic political activity made it easy to miss the public spending round announcement on 4 September which only covered spending for 2020-21. Talk of an early General Election led to it being neglected but the Chancellor's statement does provide a useful steer on the direction of current (and perhaps future) government policy as we prepare the new SDNPA budget. The Defra settlement includes:

- a 3.3% increase in real terms to the department's resource budget from 2019-20 to 2020-21;
- £432 million of Brexit funding to "deliver a safe and ambitious departure from the European Union (EU), while setting global standards in protecting and harnessing value from the natural environment. This includes an additional £20 million to support delivery of Defra's replacement for the CAP in England, which will prioritise environmental outcomes";
- a £30 million increase in funding for air quality;
- an additional £30 million for biodiversity measures, which is disappointing given the level of additional funding in other areas and the importance of this topic in the 25 year Plan for the Environment;

- an additional £8 million for animal health.
- 2.3 The government has maintained its commitment to “provide the same cash total in funds for farm support until the end of the Parliament” which suggests that they will need to issue much clearer guidance on this topic as we approach 31 October and/or an election.
- 3. Progress of Existing Projects**
- 3.1 Work continues locally and nationally to position National Parks in the centre of the debate with Government, Farmers and Foresters and rural businesses about **future policy and funding for farming**. Defra is still developing its proposals for the England Land Management Scheme (ELMS), which will replace funding from the Common Agricultural Policy once we leave the EU. Here in the South Downs we are about to embark on the second wave (2 and 3 October) of four workshops with farmers to inform development of the new scheme.
- 3.2 In the meantime, the Farm Cluster network within the National Park continues to grow in strength. Two new clusters are emerging around the Meon Valley and south of the Rother Valley – which would bring the number of clusters to eight. A new website, “South Downs Farming” will be launched soon, and during the period of our next Partnership Management Plan farm clusters will be developing work on wildlife restoration, public engagement, soils and water.
- 3.3 Working through National Parks England, we have also been very actively involved in discussions with Defra and other organisations about the other aspect of policy – **rural development**. In a positive meeting with officials we have laid out our proposals for National Park Authorities to play a key role in the design and delivery of the schemes – such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund – which will replace EU programmes like LEADER. This really matters in the South Downs because we have over 8000 rural businesses of all types and our farmers and estates are often very diversified. Access to broadband, capital investment, skilled labour and affordable housing are all crucial in addition to any scheme to support sustainable land management.
- 3.4 The campaign to celebrate **70 years of protected landscapes** under the banner, “Going Out Out” (<http://going-outout.co.uk/>), was launched on 19 July with posters displayed across Great Western Rail, Great Eastern, Metro bus, Stagecoach and Brighton Buses. The campaign, which encourages young people to visit our special landscapes, was launched with the enthusiastic support of Julian Glover. The posters remain on display with more going up on South Western over September. Southern have proved to be one of the more challenging operators but we hope they will join the campaign in the coming weeks. Gatwick Airport displayed our posters across the airport during 29 and 31 July with another promotion scheduled in autumn. We are still collating figures for the overall campaign but the Gatwick posters alone reached 231,555 people.
- 3.5 We have worked very hard through our **events programme** this summer to engage with specific groups of people underrepresented in our visitor profile. We have engaged widely with young people through our school STEM events, our National Citizen Service days, Youth Action Days, the international Girl Guides Olave event and at Boomtown Fair in Hampshire. We have attended outreach events such as the Southampton Mela and continue to visit town centres and seafronts with the events van. Our second Wild Chalk event in East Brighton drew in around 1,700 people from the neighbouring Whitehawk and Kemptown areas. We have also supported our partners with their own events: the Arun to Adur Farm Open Day, the Gilbert White’s House Nature Day, and the Rare Breeds show at the Weald and Downland Museum. Closer to home we held a garden party at the South Downs Centre to raise the profile of the services we offer as a visitor centre.
- 4. Volunteers and Delivery**
- 4.1 In the first quarter of 2019-20 6400 hours were contributed with the involvement of 252 volunteers. 1000 of these hours were in support of access management while 4700 involved the practical conservation of the landscape. The number of hours is slightly down due to the

bird breeding season limiting tasks and a trend of declining volunteer activity over the spring and summer months due to holidaying.

- 4.2 Working with area teams and external partners, volunteers delivered 292 days in support of Access Land and over 200 days in support of partners. The most common task was scrub clearance with 121 days. There was a large amount of activity for more unusual tasks such as drystone walling (90 days) and beach cleans at Seven Sisters Country Park (78 days).

- 4.3 In terms of volunteering development, the youth ambassador programme has progressed with key events taking place in Q1. On 15 April two youth ambassador volunteers held a social media takeover, publishing their own content through the SDNPA Instagram and Twitter pages promoting micro-volunteering. This is a way for everyone to volunteer their time in 'bite-sized' chunks through things like a 2-minute beach clean, submitting species records on a smartphone app or reporting rights of way issues online. The youth ambassadors also delivered a presentation at a Young Nature UK symposium at Brighton University in June, sharing a platform with academics, environmental professionals and the keynote speaker, Caroline Lucas MP.

5. Corporate Update

- 5.1 In July, the Government provided its response to the submissions received on the consultation for making **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)** mandatory for developments when granting planning permission. The aim of the BNG approach is to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than beforehand. The consultation sought views on various aspects of how this approach might work, including which types of development the requirement should apply to, standardising the approach, and the amount of overall net gain to be achieved. Officers at the SDNPA led on the National Parks England submission to the consultation.

- 5.2 The response from the government clarifies what BNG is expected to involve. However there are still important questions remaining on which government indicate there is to be further stakeholder engagement and guidance. The headlines from the government are:

- Confirmation that the requirement for BNG will be established through the Environment Bill. The requirement will be for a minimum of 10% BNG, to be maintained for a minimum of 30 years. There will be a two-year transition period, starting from when the Environment Bill receives Royal Assent.
- There will be some exemptions for certain types of development, including permitted development, householder applications and also targeted exemption for certain brownfield development (in circumstances where there are no priority habitats present, where there are viability issues). The process will be simplified for minor developments.
- Assessment of BNG will be done via the newly published DEFRA Metric. For BNG that cannot be delivered on site, the government will set a standard cost for 'statutory biodiversity units' and the revenue from the sale of these units will, where possible, be invested in pre-determined local projects.
- The Environment Bill will introduce the creation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) – which will set priorities, strategy and local habitat map with opportunities. The Secretary of State will appoint the local responsible authority for the LNRS. Potential future requirements for wider 'Environmental Net Gain' will be explored further by Natural Capital Committee.

6. Lessons from other NPAs

- 6.1 Members will remember that two years ago SDNPA successfully hosted the conference for the 15 UK National Parks that occurs every two years. The next such conference took place in the Yorkshire Dales from 17 to 19 September. It will be attended by myself, Margaret Paren, Heather Baker, Helen Jackson and Andrew Lee. These conferences are an invaluable forum for exchanging best practice amongst NPAs and my write up of the event, which was published as my blog on the 20th September is appended to this paper (**Appendix 1**).

7. Media and Communications

- 7.1 The three themes of the Public Affairs Strategy have been central to our media coverage over the summer. Sustainable Tourism has been a major focus with the launch of Ranger Experiences to give visitors a deeper understanding of the National Park. BBC South East covered the story – also touching on the success of the National Park as we approach the 10th anniversary – in the evening and lunchtime news, reaching an audience of more than 500,000 people.
- 7.2 The future of farming has been a priority, with the launch of the “Meet The Farmer” walk and listen trail receiving coverage from the NFU and Farming UK. The videos have been hugely popular on our social channels, receiving over 7,200 views on Twitter and over 1,148 engagements of likes, retweets and replies.
- 7.3 World Water Week during August was marked with a piece in the National Park newsletter about six ways to conserve the water of the South Downs. Other highlights of the summer have been extensive regional and national coverage on the Miles Without Stiles initiative to open up routes for people with limited mobility, as well as coverage of our Dog Fun Day, including hits in national publication Dogs Monthly featuring our Take The Lead campaign.
- 7.4 A segment on our International Dark Skies Reserve status was featured on Radio 4’s Today Programme. The interview with Ranger Charles Winchester and Kate Dziubinska reached an audience of more than 6.5m.
- 7.5 Our social media channels continue to grow significantly, particularly Instagram. We now have 12,641 followers on Twitter, 11,375 on Facebook and 8,850 on Instagram.

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 2 July 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	1. Chief Executive’s Blog 20.09.19
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