

Agenda Item 15
Report PRI9/20-37

Report to	Policy & Resources Committee
Date	27 February 2020
By	Countryside and Policy Manager and Farming Officer
Title of Report (Note)	Farm Cluster Implementation Mid-Term Review

Recommendations: The committee is recommended to:

- 1) **Note the Farm Cluster Implementation & Development mid-term review as set out in Appendix 2.**
- 2) **Note the importance of the farm clusters programme and the role farm clusters play in delivering the purposes and duty of the National Park authority.**
- 3) **Endorse the principle of continued Authority support for the ongoing operation and expansion of the farm clusters programme at least until the detail of the new ELMS schemes published**
- 4) **Endorse the continuation of staff resource and capacity to support the emerging landscape agenda at least until roll-out of the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) system (in late 2024).**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This mid-term review (**Appendix 2**) provides an update on the SDNPA's work with the South Downs farming community through the network of farm cluster groups.

2. Background

- 2.1 The UK farming sector is going through a significant time of change. As the UK transitions towards a new UK Agriculture Policy, direct support through the Basic Payment Scheme will be replaced by the principle of 'public payments for public goods'. This will be delivered through the Environmental Land Management (ELM) system and will represent a significant shift in the way farm businesses are supported.
- 2.2 There are currently six farm cluster groups in the South Downs National Park (as shown in **Appendix 1**). Established between 2015 and 2017, the groups were formed independently by farmers/landowners and their advisors.
- 2.3 Each farm cluster group has selected their own objectives relevant to the landscape and issues in their local area. The groups are run by facilitators selected by members. The facilitators are supported by farmer led steering groups. The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) is represented across all six farm cluster groups.
- 2.4 The farm cluster groups work with partners (including government agencies, non-governmental organisations and farming bodies) who offer additional knowledge and expertise to help them deliver their objectives.
- 2.5 Five of the six farm cluster groups are funded through the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund (CSS FF). This covers facilitator time and group training. Private funding is

also an important component of future funding, which all groups are keen to explore further.

3. Delivery

- 3.1 To help guide delivery, each farm cluster group has drawn up an operational plan. This sets out each group's objectives and the activities by which they will achieve them. All farm cluster groups are delivering a variety of projects/work covering biodiversity, habitat improvement, pollution reduction, farm productivity and public engagement.
- 3.2 The SDNPA provides a support role for all farm cluster groups through the three year Farming Officer post (March 2018 – March 2021). To date this support has included:
- Media and communications e.g. farm open days, 'Meet the Farmer' videos, social media.
 - Species surveys e.g. breeding waders in the Arun Valley.
 - Habitat creation e.g. seeding chalk grassland in the Winchester Downs Cluster.
 - Project fundraising e.g. with South Downs Trust and the Pollinator Project.
- 3.3 This work is identified in the emerging corporate plan and to date, delivery progress against objectives has clearly demonstrated the value of farmers and partners working together at a landscape scale, achieving more than they could on their own.

4. Issues for consideration

- 4.1 Funding for the farm cluster groups currently comes predominately from CSS FF. However, this funding is time limited, although steps are being taken by all the groups to assess future funding opportunities. Currently this is the biggest risk to farm clusters, although they are seen by farmers as long-term initiatives.

5. Other Implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	Yes. The SDNPA will need to ensure the retention of the Farming Officer post to ensure its continued support for the farm cluster groups in the SDNP.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Not applicable.
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?	There are no equalities implications arising from this report.
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?	No
Are there any Data Protection implications?	No
Are there any Sustainability implications based on the 5 principles set out in the SDNPA Sustainability Strategy.	No

6. Risks

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Farm cluster groups fail to identify suitable funding post CSS FF and cease to operate.	2	4	SDNPA is facilitating discussions between farm cluster groups to consider options and plan ahead in good time.
SDNPA Farming Officer post is not extended.	2	4	The level of support to all farm cluster groups would need to be reviewed and require a significant reduction.

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Appendices

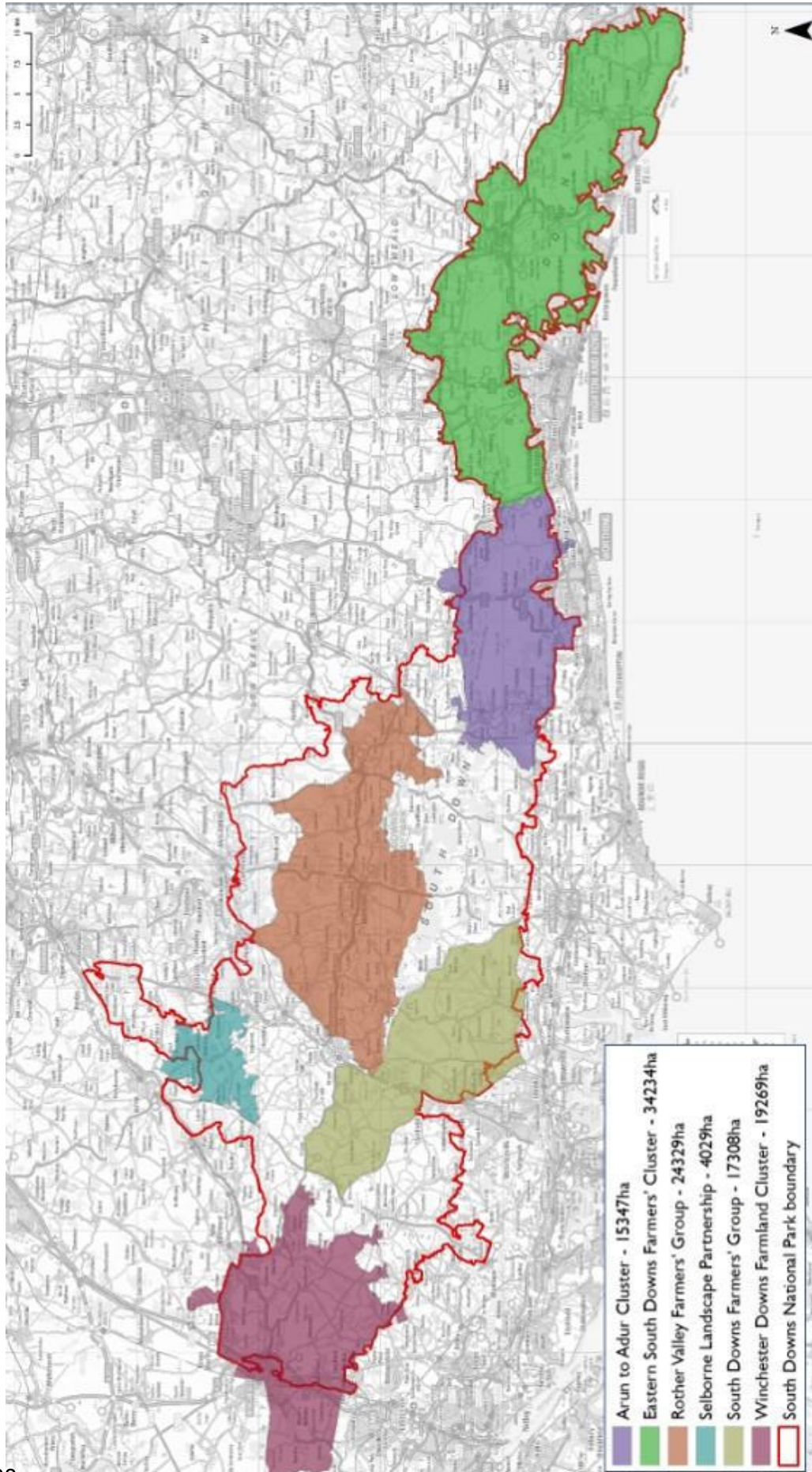
1. Map of 6 Farm Clusters
2. Mid Term Review

SDNPA Consultees

External Consultees None

Background Documents South Downs farm cluster group map:
I:\Teams\western_area\FARMING\CLUSTERS\SD Farm clusters map.jpg
 Winchester Downs Cluster Operational Plan: [WDC Operational Plan.pdf](#)
 Meet the Farmer Project Brief:
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Agenda Item 15 Report PR19/20-37 Appendix 1
 Map of the 6 Farm Clusters in the SDNP



Mid Project Review

Project Overview

PROJECT TITLE:	Farm Cluster Implementation & Development
PROJECT LEAD (AUTHOR):	Bruce Fowkes
PROJECT START DATE:	April 2018
PROJECT END DATE:	March 2021
PROJECT TYPE:	Medium

Executive Summary

The South Downs National Park Authority’s (SDNPA) work with farm cluster groups is considered to be core work and therefore it should not be viewed as a project in the true sense of the term. However, a review is considered appropriate to ensure the organisation’s work with farm clusters is achieving PMP outcomes.

The six farm cluster groups in the South Downs National Park (SDNP) are farmer led and autonomous, and set their own objectives relevant to their local landscapes and issues affecting farming in their area. Progress to date has shown the value of farmers and partners (including government agencies, non-governmental organisations and farming bodies) working together at a landscape scale to achieve more than they could on their own. Funding for the farm cluster groups currently comes predominately from the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund (CSS FF), paying for a facilitator and a training programme for group members. The CSS FF is time limited and steps are being taken to assess future funding opportunities. This is the current biggest risk to farm clusters, although they are seen by farmers as long-term initiatives.

The SDNPA provides support to all the farm cluster groups in the SDNP to help them deliver their objectives. This has provided an effective mechanism of working with the farming community in the SDNP.



Project background

There are currently six farm cluster groups in the SDNP (see map below). These are:

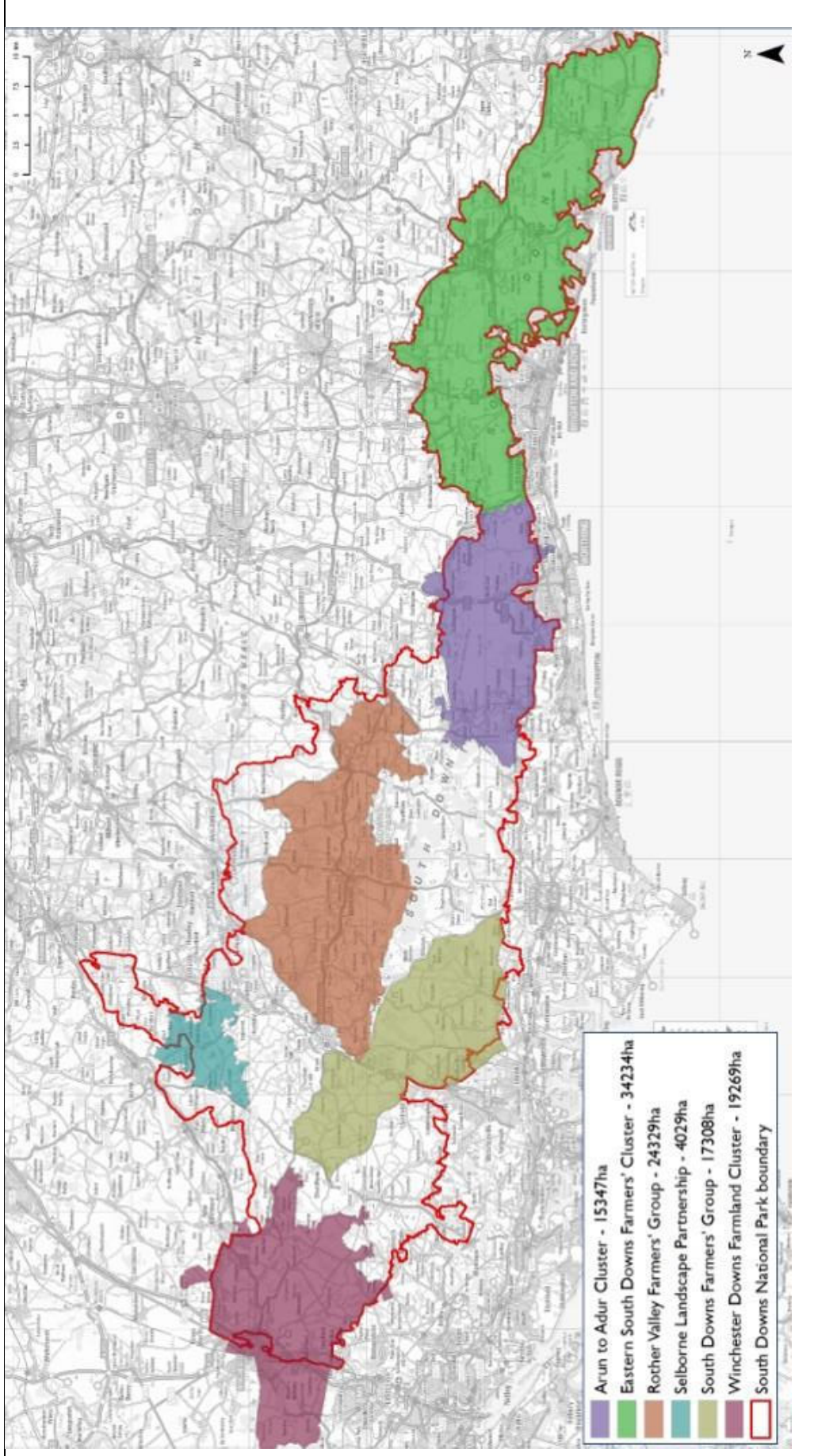
- Eastern South Downs Farmers' Cluster - 35 farms.
- Arun to Adur Cluster - 30 farms.
- Rother Valley Farmers' Group - 25 farms.
- South Downs Farmers' Group - 20 farms.
- Selborne Landscape Partnership - 18 farms.
- Winchester Downs Farmland Cluster - 35 farms.

Established by local farmers and their advisors, the farm cluster groups aim to share knowledge and experiences to work collaboratively at a landscape scale. Each group have selected their own objectives relative to the farming and biodiversity in their area. These include; improving farmland wildlife populations, improving soil quality, reducing diffuse pollution and increasing engagement with the public. The SDNPA supports all six farm cluster groups helping to facilitate the delivery of actions and projects that deliver their objectives.

This work delivers the following Partnership Management Plan outcomes:

- Outcome 1 - Landscape & Natural Beauty.
- Outcome 2 - Increasing Resilience.
- Outcome 3 - Habitats & Species.





Analysis of project

PROJECT TIMING:	<p>Current project timing is linked to funding for the groups' facilitators, which is predominantly through the CSS FF. Funding for all CSS FF farm cluster groups in the SDNP ends in 2020/21. The only exception is the South Downs Farmers' Group who are not in receipt of CSS FF and have on-going funding from Portsmouth Water.</p> <p>The SDNPA's Farming Officer post is the main liaison mechanism with the farm cluster groups. This is currently a three year contract from March 2018 to March 2021.</p>
PROJECT CONTROL & GOVERNANCE:	<p>Each farm cluster group is governed by a small steering group comprising farmer members and representatives from partner organisations. The SDNPA is represented on all six farm cluster groups. Steering groups meet three to four times a year to set direction and plan group delivery.</p>
PARTNERS:	<p>The key partners for the SDNPA in this area of core work are the farm cluster groups and their respective steering groups.</p> <p>The groups themselves work with a range of partners and organisations who offer resources and expertise to enable them to deliver their objectives. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural England. • Southern Water. • Portsmouth Water. • Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). • Wildlife Trusts.
LEGACY & SUSTAINABILITY:	<p>The farm cluster groups in the SDNP are well established with a strong sense of shared ownership and commitment. They are seen as a long-term mechanism to deliver agricultural, environmental and social objectives. Continued funding for facilitator time and group activity This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued CSS FF: Although there has been no indication of this to date by Defra. • Private funding: For example, water companies. • Biodiversity offsetting: The potential to access funds to mitigate negative environmental impacts.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-funding: Members pay for the group themselves. For example, members pay £1/ha/year. <p>The SDNPA is working collectively with all the farm cluster groups on legacy and sustainability issues and intends to maintain a close working relationship and involvement with their work going forward.</p> <p>The biggest risk is that farm cluster groups cease to operate after their initial funding support ends. This will mean that their delivery on the ground, collaborative working, and the commitment, trust and strong working relationships that have been developed between the farm cluster groups and their partners will stop.</p> <p>Farm cluster groups offer a fantastic way to work constructively with the farming community to deliver the SDNPA’s purposes and duties. The SDNPA’s main liaison with farm cluster groups is through the Farming Officer post. This is due to end in March 2021 after which there will be insufficient resources to continue to support farm clusters at the same level. As the work of farm clusters continues to evolve particularly with the on-going development and arrival of the Environmental Land Management (ELM) system (subsequent to the United Kingdom’s departure from the European Union), this is a risk for the SDNPA.</p>
<p>COMMUNICATIONS:</p>	<p>Communications has become a key and effective area in which the SDNPA supports the farm cluster groups, providing a platform to explain and showcase the work and projects they are undertaking. To date, communications support has included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Meet the Farmer’: A series of short videos presented by farmers explaining to the public what they do on their farms (www.youtube.com/user/sdnpa/videos). • South Downs Farm Cluster Network social media accounts: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts to showcase the work of farm cluster groups in the SDNP. • South Downs Farming website: A stand-alone website (www.southdownsfarming.com) specifically about farming and farm clusters groups in the SDNP. • Farm Signage: South Downs Farm Cluster Network sign templates that allow individual groups and farmers to display messages about their farming activities and management in a consistent and recognisable way. • Farm Open Days: The SDNPA has provided support to set up and manage farm events open to the public, including Open Farm Sunday with the Arun to Adur Cluster.



<p>MONITORING & EVALUATION</p>	<p>All the farm cluster groups monitor progress against their objectives within their individual operational plan. In addition, those currently funded by the CSS FF are also required by Defra to report on progress as outlined in their funding agreements (including number of members, training events and farmer engagement).</p> <p>The SDNPA is able to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the communication and social media work by monitoring viewing and engagement numbers (e.g. Twitter and YouTube). This will help to inform how this work is developed in the future.</p>
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Successes/Challenges

<p>KEY SUCCESSES:</p>	<p>The key success has been the increased level of collaborative working across the SDNP, both within the farming community and with partner organisations. Examples include a number of farm cluster groups working with water companies to reduce nitrate pollution into the aquifer, breeding wader recovery projects and ‘Meet the Farmer’ videos.</p> <p>The communications work has been a significant success, enabling better understanding and connecting people who use and enjoying the SDNP with those who work and manage the landscape. Notable successes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 ‘Meet the Farmer’ videos produced and in location along the SDW, receiving 10,060 views, 74,602 impressions on Twitter and 2688 views on YouTube. • www.southdownsfarming.com providing a platform and web presence for farm clusters groups to promote and showcase their work.
<p>KEY CHALLENGES:</p>	<p>The key challenge facing all farm cluster groups is future funding to enable them to continue. ELM is set to be fully rolled out in 2024, and will provide ‘public payments for public goods’. After this time, there is the possibility of ELM funding both the establishment and running of farm cluster groups. However, as CSS FF funding for many farm cluster groups in the SDNP ends in the next one to two years, sourcing funding during the interim period will be crucial.</p>



Total Project Resources

SDNPA RESOURCE

The SDNPA's Farming Officer post is the main liaison mechanism with the all six farm cluster groups in the SDNP. Currently, this is a three year contract (from March 2018 to March 2021).

Project Finance

The SDNPA's work with farm cluster groups is currently undertaken through the three year Farming Officer post. Funded through the SDNPA Strategic Fund, the costs for this post are £150,000 (£50,000 per annum from April 2018 to March 2021).



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