

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 28 NOVEMBER 2019

Held at the Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre, Midhurst at 1pm

Present: Ken Bodfish (Chair), Chris Dowling, Doug Jones, Russell Oppenheimer, Henry Potter, Andrew Shaxson, Isabel Thurston and Richard Waring

Independent Members of the Committee: Carole Nicholson

SDNPA Officers: Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive Officer), Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Louise Read (Monitoring Officer), Steven Bedford (Principal Accountant), Alan Brough (Head of Business Services), Robin Parr (Head of Governance) and Catherine Sydenham (Committee Officer).

Also Attended by: Mark Dallen (Internal Auditor), Allison Thorpe (Access and Recreation Strategy Lead), Phillip Paulo (Truleigh Hill – Community Project Officer), Veronica Craddock (Infrastructure and Environment Strategy Lead), Ruth James (Communications and Engagement Manager), Tanya Hibberd (Performance and Research Lead), Liz Gent (Project Management Lead), Vicky Patterson (Head of HR) and Debbie Hartman (Head of HR)

OPENING REMARKS

111. The Chair opened the meeting
112. The Chair welcomed all those present and stated that:
 - The meeting was being webcast by the Authority and would be available for subsequent on-line viewing. Anyone entering the meeting was considered to have given consent to be filmed or recorded, and for the possible use of images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purpose
 - SDNPA Members had a primary responsibility for ensuring that the Authority furthers the National Park Purposes and Duty. Members regarded themselves first and foremost as Members of the Authority, and would act in the best interests of the National Park as a whole, rather than as representatives of their appointing body or any interest groups.
113. Reference was made to the recent South East Region Royal Town Planning Institute Award for the Local Plan that was presented to SDNPA for Excellence in Planning for the Natural Environment, Officers and Members were congratulated for the collaborative working on the Local Plan.
114. **ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
115. Apologies were received from Sebastian Anstruther, Helen Burton, Helen Jackson, Tom Fourcade (Independent Member of the Committee), Margaret Paren (Ex-officio Member) and Ian Phillips (Ex-officio Member).

ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

116. Chris Dowling declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Items 10 & 18 as his wife was a Cabinet Member of East Sussex County Council. Chris Dowling left the meeting for both items 10 & 18.

ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2019

117. The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 26 September 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

118. There were none

ITEM 5: URGENT MATTERS

119. There were none

ITEM 6: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

120. There were no Public Speakers.

ITEM 7: BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2019/20: MONTH 6

121. The Principal Accountant introduced report PR19/20-18 and reminded members of the report content.

122. The Committee commented that:

- They were pleased to see the creation of the Transport Analyst role.
- A report on how S106 and CIL monies were spent should be brought to a future committee.

123. In response to questions Officers clarified that:

- In response to the small amount of negative publicity received regarding Phase 2 of the Entry Signage Project, a comparison to other National Parks Entry Signage project costs would be circulated to Members. The project costs were more than just the manufacture of the signs and included other costs such as passive safety tests and road closure orders.
- 1 new vehicle was being purchased during the financial year to replace the Land Rover that had been written off. All the pool cars were either hybrid or electric but off road vehicles were not currently available as either hybrid or electric, therefore the new vehicle would be diesel. As part of the Net Zero Greenhouse Gas Neutral work that would be brought to a future NPA for consideration timescales for off road electric/hybrid vehicles would be examined.
- S106 Receipts Reserves has been reduced and no S106 monies had ever been returned due to not being spent within the time frame. The biggest challenge to the Authority was spending the S106 monies as close to where they had been collected as possible.

124. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:

- 1) Noted the 2019/20 revenue forecast position as at month 6 of a net (£122,000) below budget variance.
- 2) Noted the 2019/20 capital forecast position as at month 6 of a zero budget variance.
- 3) Noted the reserves position as at month 6.
- 4) Noted the Treasury Management overview and position as at month 6.

ITEM 8: INTERNAL AUDIT – PROGRESS REPORT

125. The Internal Auditor introduced report PR19/20-19 and reminded member of the report content.

126. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:

- 1) Noted progress against the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan (2019/20).
- 2) Noted the implementation of audit actions previously agreed by management.

ITEM 9: EXTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2018/19

127. The Principal Accountant introduced report PR19/20-20 and reminded members of the report content on behalf of the External Auditor.
128. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- Pensions were a high risk liability area to all Local Authorities. The risk was not a threat to the SDNPA revenue budget and had been taken off the Corporate Risk Register.
129. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:
- 1) Considered the Annual Audit Letter 2018/19.

ITEM 10: FALMER – WOODINGDEAN PATH RESURFACING

130. The Access and Recreation Strategy Lead introduced report PR19/20-21, reminded members of the report content and gave a presentation.
131. Chris Dowling declared a Personal Interest as his wife was a Cabinet Member of East Sussex County Council and left the meeting.
132. The Committee commented that:
- It would like to see the path resurfacing completed as one project not 2 separate smaller projects. The correct surface for the topography of the land should be used in order that a long term solution was created.
 - It can be very difficult to find the path from the Falmer end and therefore better signage was needed.
 - Officers should also consider the opportunity to provide interpretation and promotion of the SDNP along the path.
 - There was no footpath on the very busy road and therefore on safety grounds works needed to happen to repair the path.
133. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- Both the Universities and the Amex Stadium had been approached to contribute to the funding of the resurfacing but had to date not agreed to contribute any funding.
 - A Joint Creation Order was being created but would not be signed until after the works to the path had been finished.
 - There were efficiencies for the scheme to be completed as a whole and the release of the funds from the Strategic Fund should be subject to the adoption of the footpath by the Rights of Way Authority as a Public Bridleway.
134. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:
- 1) Approved the allocation of £100,000 from the Strategic Fund to the Falmer – Woodingdean Path resurfacing project.
 - 2) Delegated authority to Director of Countryside Policy and Management in consultation with the Chair of the Policy & Resources Committee to determine the appropriate release of funds in the event that the project proceeds on the basis of a phased implementation.
135. Chris Dowling re-joined the meeting.
136. Russell Oppenheimer left the meeting.

ITEM 11: TRULEIGH HILL MID PROJECT REVIEW

137. The Truleigh Hill Community Project Officer introduced report PRI 9/20-22 and reminded members of the report content.
138. The Committee commented that:
- This was a significant project in a prominent part of the SDNP and it was important that there was a legacy at the end of the 2 year project.
 - Antisocial behaviour was not unique to Truleigh Hill.
139. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- There are 2 stages to the project with the first stage being the consultation phase and the second stage seeing the change on the ground with a clear action plan. The project was currently midway through and would be moving to stage 2. In order to achieve the 2 stages there were 3 key areas to the project: Sustainability with building the capacity of the local community; work with partner organisations; linking to work across the whole of the SDNPA such as the work of the Ranger Team, Health and Wellbeing, Access etc.
 - The local community were highly engaged with the project through a range of different methods such as the John Muir award, social prescribing etc.
 - Tackling the antisocial behaviour was a key priority due to the significant impact it had on the landscape as well as visitor enjoyment.
140. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:
- 1) Received and considered the mid- point project evaluation report for the Truleigh Hill landscape project

ITEM 12: UPDATE ON PEOPLE & NATURE NETWORK – GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AND WIDER SOUTH EAST

141. The Infrastructure and Environment Strategy Lead and the Communications and Engagement Manager introduced report PRI 9/20-23, reminded members of the report content and gave a short presentation.
142. The Committee commented that:
- It was extremely important that the SDNP did not become the default Green Infrastructure space for any new developments beyond the SDNP boundary. Communications work for the project should spread beyond the boundary of the National Park.
 - Communication should show the involvement of the SDNPA in any joint Green Infrastructure projects.
143. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The project was branded as National Park not National Park Authority.
 - Work was already happening with Chichester District Council and Chichester Harbour Conservancy to ensure that there were green corridors with new developments along the SDNP boundary. Talks had also begun with Waverley Borough Council and Surrey Hill AONB to extend the Heathlands Reunited project beyond the boundary of the SDNP.
 - The ‘People and Nature Network’ document was just one method of communicating and communication would also be achieved through the redesign of the SDNPA website with better interactive landscape mapping.
144. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:
- 1) Noted the further work carried out to date on the People & Nature Network – Green

infrastructure in the South Downs National Park wider South East.

ITEM 13: WEALDEN HEATH AREA OFFICE PROPOSAL – HEATH BARN FARM

145. The Head of Business Services introduced report PR19/20-24 and reminded members of the report content. The Chief Executive informed the Committee that the current accommodation within the Midhurst Depot was on a rolling 3 month notice period and did not provide satisfactory accommodation for the Ranger Team. The solution presented was the result of more than a year of extensive searching to find suitable accommodation and although in other locations the area offices were also a 'shop window' this was not needed for the Wealden Heath Team due to the proximity to Midhurst.
146. The Committee commented that:
- It was essential that a break clause was included in the lease, so that nothing was left to chance. Members also asked for it to be agreed that if the lease was terminated early how any of the SDNPA capital investment for the refurbishment works to the building would be returned from the National Trust. Members asked that this be included in the report to the NPA.
 - Members were unsure that the officer's suggestion of including a lease assignment within the lease would be sufficient protection and asked for further consideration to be given to this in the report to the NPA.
 - Alternative methods of heating should be investigated with costs supplied in the NPA report to allow members to make an informed decision.
147. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- If the National Trust paid for the refurbishment works themselves and then charged SDNPA the commercial rent it would be in the region of £24,000 per annum, which was in line with the rent of the other area offices.
 - Having refitted the building to the standard that SDNPA require Officers would not anticipate that the Authority would wish to terminate the lease early, however the option of a break clause would be explored.
 - Officers had considered the option of buying a property, however it was likely that this would use the budget in the purchase of the building and leave nothing to refurbish to the standards needed and therefore was not an option.
 - The committee could be certain that the points raised would be addressed in the paper that would be going to a future NPA for agreement.
148. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:
- 1) Noted the position regarding the refurbishment costs of Heath Barn and the proposed lease arrangements with the National Trust.
 - 2) Recommended to the Authority that it approved the proposal relating to Heath Barn Farm at the NPA meeting on 19 December 2019.

ITEM 14 & 15: QUARTER 2 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT AND QUARTER 2 PROJECT UPDATE

149. The Performance and Research Lead and Project Management Lead introduced report PR19/20-25 & PR19/20-26 and reminded members of the report content.
150. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The significant improvements to the website should be completed by the end of the current financial year.
 - Ancient Monument classification would be checked with Historic England.
 - The Estimated time of completion of the Centurion Way project was 1 year from when the funds were available to do the works.

151. **RESOLVED** That the Committee:
1) Received and noted the Quarter 2 Corporate Performance report

152. **RESOLVED** That the Committee:
1) Received and noted the Quarter 2 overview of SDNPA projects

ITEM 16: ANNUAL HUMAN RESOURCES REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2018/19

153. The Head of Human Resources introduced report PR19/20-27 and reminded members of the report content.

154. The Committee commented that:

- It would be advantageous if Officers were aware of Members' backgrounds, knowledge and experience as this could be a solution to assist staff understanding the role of Members within the Authority.
- In future reports it would be helpful to highlight the mental health support available to staff and the benefits received through the Cash Plan, Simply Health.
- Members congratulated the Authority on the low levels of work related stress reported.

155. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- Member Services were arranging for 2 members to be on the culture group.
- A module on ELMS, eLearning, was being created on the role of members which would become part of the staff induction process.
- The Authority has invested heavily in supporting staff mental health with 15 staff trained as Mental Health First Aiders and all managers attended training sessions on mental health awareness. Staff are also able to receive counselling sessions through the cash plan, Simply Health.
- Staff and Members are reimbursed for flu jabs through the Cash Plan, Simply Health.
- Information on Simply Health would be circulated to all Members of the Authority.

156. **RESOLVED** : That the Committee:
1) Noted the Report.

ITEM 17: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

157. The Head of Governance introduced report PR19/20-28 and reminded members of the report content.

158. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- The arrow on Risk 17: 'Brexit Transition' had changed direction to indicate the likely direction of travel but the score had not changed due to no new information being available.

159. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:
1) Noted the Corporate Risk Register as at November 2019

160. Chris Dowling declared a Personal Interest in Item 18 as his wife was a member of the Cabinet at East Sussex County Council and left the meeting.

ITEM 18: SEVEN SISTERS COUNTY PARK – PROJECT PROGRESS UPDATE

161. The Chief Executive introduced report PR19/20-29 and explained that the Committee would receive regular reports in a standard format.

162. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- Due to the term of office ending for 2 members on the project board, Officers expected that the new Chair and Deputy chair of Policy and Resources Committee

would hold these roles.

- The majority of the capital proposed related to refitting and refurbishing the buildings already there but with more interpretation provided to highlight assets that were not obvious.

163. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:

- 1) Received and noted the progress with regard to the Seven Sisters Country Park project.

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 3.35pm