

Report to	<b>Policy &amp; Resources Committee</b>
Date	<b>24 September 2020</b>
By	<b>Communications &amp; Engagement Manager</b>
Title of Report (Decision)	<b>Engagement: Our Strategic Focus Going Forward</b>

**Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to**

- 1. Approve the strategic direction of SDNPA engagement activities to inform the work of the Communications and Engagement Team pending the development of the new Communications & Engagement Strategy.**
- 2. Endorse SDNPA engagement activity with Parishes.**

**1. Introduction**

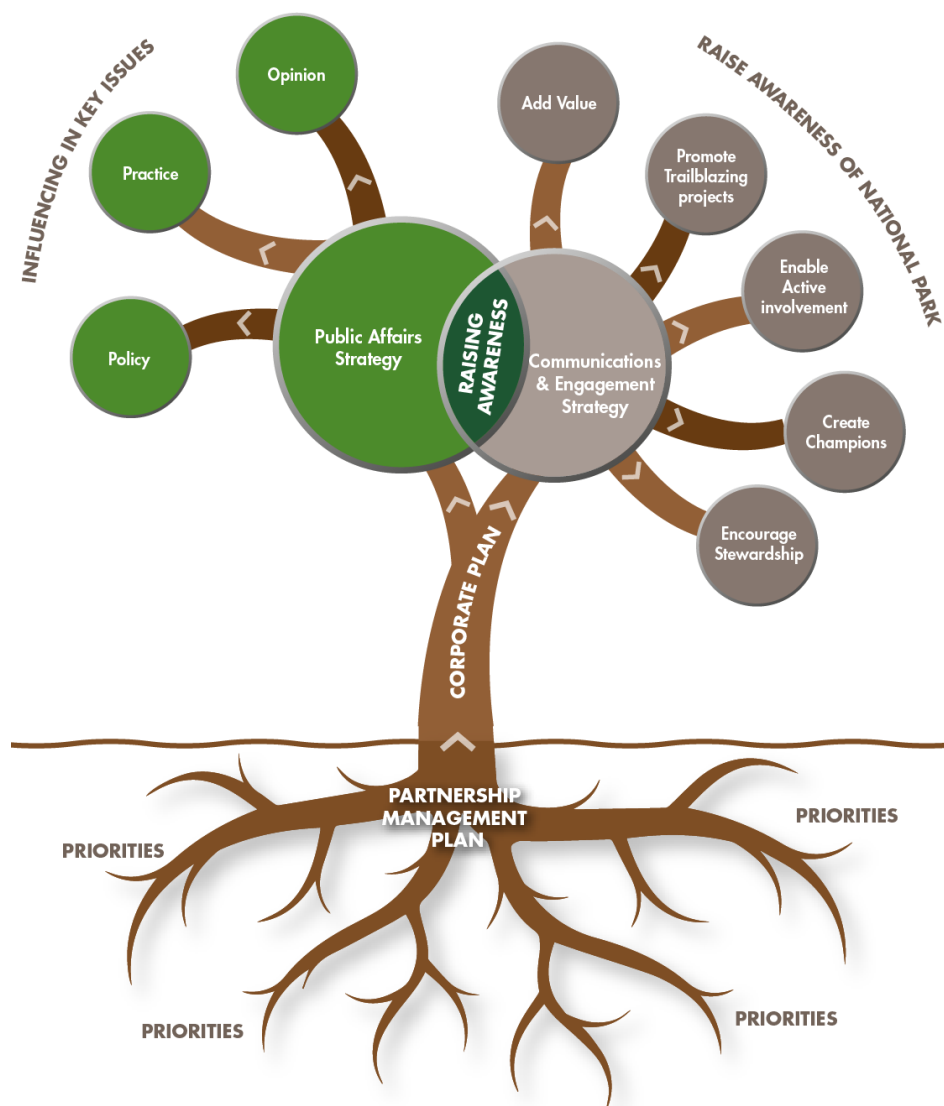
- 1.1 Our engagement work is designed to create a long-lasting relationship between people and the South Downs National Park, as individuals, part of communities, businesses and organisations. It is through this long-lasting connection that we move people along the ladder of stewardship from awareness of the National Park to taking action to help secure its future, whether that be through positive behaviour, volunteering, financial support or being a champion for this internationally important landscape.
- 1.2 Work in delivering the current Communications & Engagement Strategy and Public Affairs Strategy, has been highly effective, as this paper will demonstrate, but much has changed since they were produced and both documents are due for revision. Fully updated drafts will be brought to the December NPA but as a guide to their preparation it would be helpful to have the views of members on the strategic direction of our communications and engagement work. This is also necessary to ensure that we are able to prioritise our communications efforts.
- 1.3 With endless possibilities for engagement and communication and finite resources, we must really focus our communications and engagement work so that we can not only deliver on our objectives, but so that we can respond quickly, proactively and effectively to the anticipated challenges and opportunities of the Government's response to the recommendations of the Glover review of Protected Landscapes, the public spending round, the White Papers on Planning and Local Government, the new ELMs and the Environment and Agriculture Bills.

**2. Context**

- 2.1 The current Communications & Engagement Strategy was approved by the NPA in 2012 and then updated and presented to P&R Committee in November 2017. It sets out a strategic framework for how we can deliver against the Partnership Management Plan, the Corporate Plan and the Local Plan, as well as the national agenda for National Parks as set out by Defra. The decision was taken in 2018 to review the strategy to align its timeframe with the PMP. Our current Communications & Engagement Strategy is in force and is guiding our day-to-day communications and engagement work.

- 2.2 The Communications & Engagement Strategy guides all of our communications and engagement work and has five key objectives:
- Raise awareness of the National Park with those in the South East who currently don't know about or use the National Park, with a particular emphasis on underrepresented groups.
  - Add value to people's experience and understanding of the National Park.
  - Promote the trailblazing projects and work of the National Park Authority and its partners.
  - Enable active involvement with the National Park.
  - Create well informed, inspirational champions for the National Park – internal and external
- 2.3 In addition, in December 2017, our first Public Affairs Strategy was approved by the NPA. This strategy sits alongside our Communications & Engagement Strategy but does not replace it (see Figure 1). It set in motion a coordinated approach to our public affairs work and focuses on how we can influence changes in policy, practice and thinking in the three priority issues identified by Members:
- Water
  - Future of Farming
  - Sustainable Tourism

**Figure 1: How our Communications & Engagement Strategy and Public Affairs Strategy work together**



- 2.4 Our strategic direction as an Authority and as a National Park for the next five years has been set out in the 10 Outcomes of our new Partnership Management Plan (PMP). In reviewing and developing the new PMP, it was agreed that both the Authority's own Corporate Plan and the Communications & Engagement Strategy should align with the five-year timescale of the PMP. The Public Affairs Strategy runs until 2020. With a new Partnership Management Plan in place, the time has now come to review and update both of these strategies. Getting members input into the strategic direction of our engagement is an important step on the way to bringing a revised Communications & Engagement and Public Affairs Strategies to the NPA in December 2020. These strategies will be crucial to help us guide and prioritise our broader communications work over the coming five years.
- 2.5 Communications & Engagement is a complex and ever-changing area of work and it is important that the strategic direction set out allows us to both deliver on our objectives and to be flexible and responsive enough to respond to changing external environments and changing preferences for how people like to be engaged and communicated with. We must be brave enough to say no when needed and focus on quality over quantity, ensuring we use our capacity, resources and opportunities most effectively.
- 2.6 This paper does not and should not define every operational activity or piece of communications work that will be carried out over the next five years. Rather, it sets out the principles upon which we will build our engagement work.
- 2.7 It is important to note that engagement is happening right across the work of the Authority – through our rangers interacting with farmers and communities, our communities' lead liaising daily with parishes, our education and outreach team working with schools and young people, Member contributions to their own authorities and parishes, our strategy leads working with partners and key stakeholder groups, our planners working with home owners and developers, and much more. This paper does not seek to capture or plan for all of this engagement work. Rather, it seeks through our centralised corporate communications, to ensure that we are setting the right framework to prioritise the correct mix and focus of channels and media to reach, engage and bring on board our key audiences.

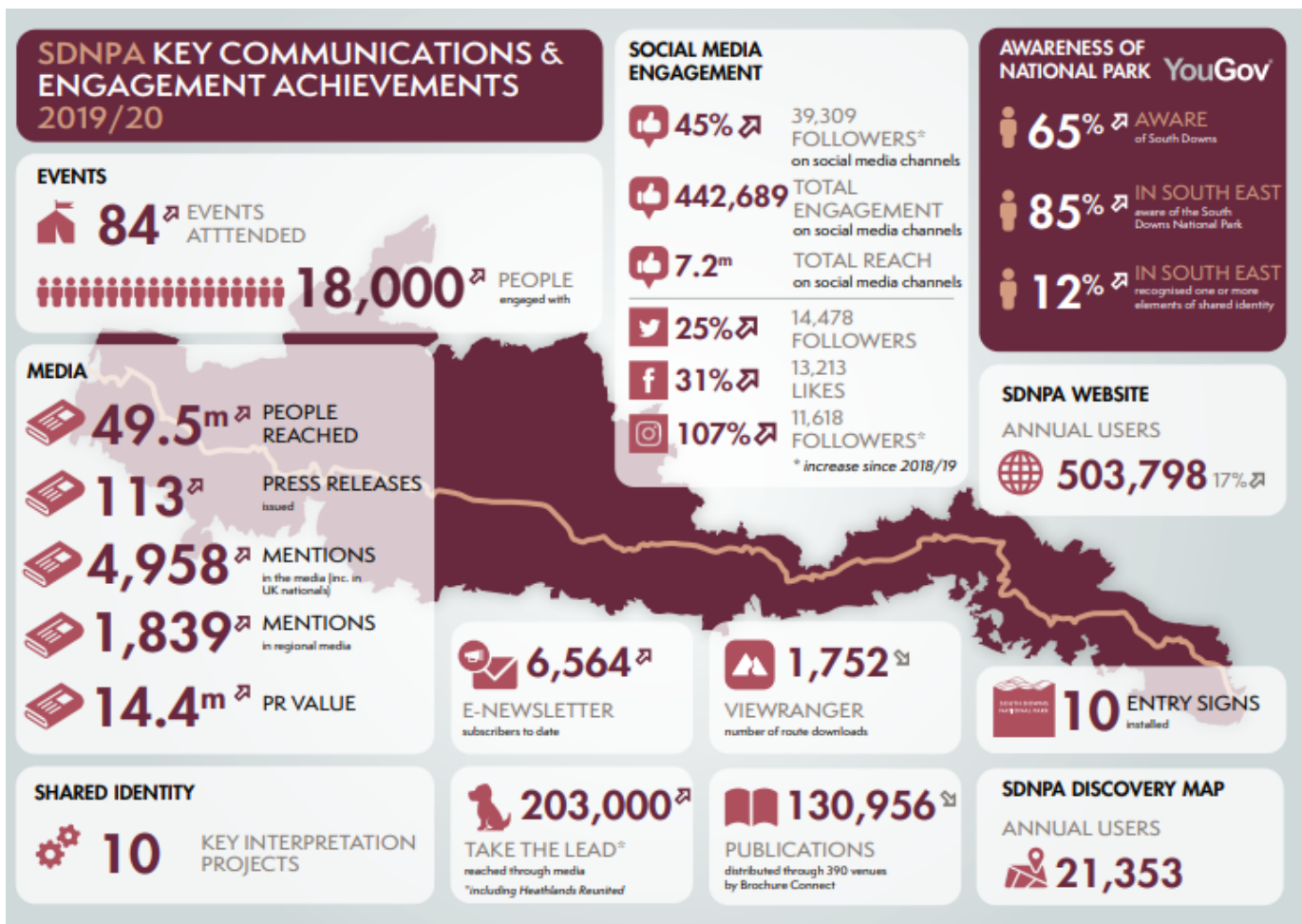
### 3. Current engagement

- 3.1 We currently use a wide range of engagement techniques and channels that expands all the time as new technologies emerge and people's preferred means of communication changes. We have a comprehensive programme of communications and engagement activities and are operating at full capacity of the resources available to the Authority. Any new work means shifting or reducing work elsewhere. Our current channels of engagement include:
- **Digital:** A brand new website with an interactive Discovery Map, a strong presence on key social media channels including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and in producing quality, engaging digital content such as film and photography.
  - **Events:**
    - key programme of our own events and attending others developed by a cross-departmental events group and signed off by the Communications & Engagement Manager and the Chief Executive.;
    - set events for key stakeholders including South Downs Partnership, parish meetings, farmers' breakfasts, Land Manager Group Meetings etc;
    - virtual events – for the first time ever we held a virtual Wild Chalk Festival. The festival was hugely successful reaching 83,000 people.
    - We also have events aimed at specific stakeholders including farmers and parishes, businesses and planners etc.
  - **Publications – Both print and digital:**
    - Two editions of **South Downs View** each year
    - **Walk and ride leaflets** which are also on the **Viewranger App**;
    - **Downland Thymes** – for our Volunteers
    - **Key publications** such as Partnership Management Plan, local Plan.
    - **Reports/evidence/specialist documents** – often produced as online documents.
    - **Enewsletter:** monthly newsletter for anyone interested in the National Park and the work of the Authority.

- **Planning newsletter:** tri-annual newsletter for anyone interested in planning issues within the National Park.
- **Media/PR:** We use an extensive programme of proactive media and PR to inform, engage and inspire people about our work and the National Park. We also manage reactive enquiries.
- **Interpretation and signage:** We work alongside partners to tell the story of the National Park and key sites within it through large-scale and small-scale interpretation. We currently have 19 boundary signs in place and are in the process of rolling out phase II, with 30 or so new boundary signs planned.
- All of these channels are underpinned by the use of the National Park **shared identity**.

3.2 Despite a disappointing end to the year with the cancellation of key 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Events due to Covid 19, 2019/20 was a hugely successful year in terms of our engagement (Figure 2). The greatest growth was seen across our digital platforms with our social media followers (↑ 45%), reach and engagement sharply increasing, and a 40% increase in newsletter subscribers. This is on top of the substantial growth seen in 2018/19. We also saw strong growth in our face-to-face engagement at events, where we engaged with 18,000 people in 2019/20 compared with 13,000 people in 2018/19.

**Figure 2: Key Communications & Engagement Achievements 2019/20**



#### 4 Aims of our engagement

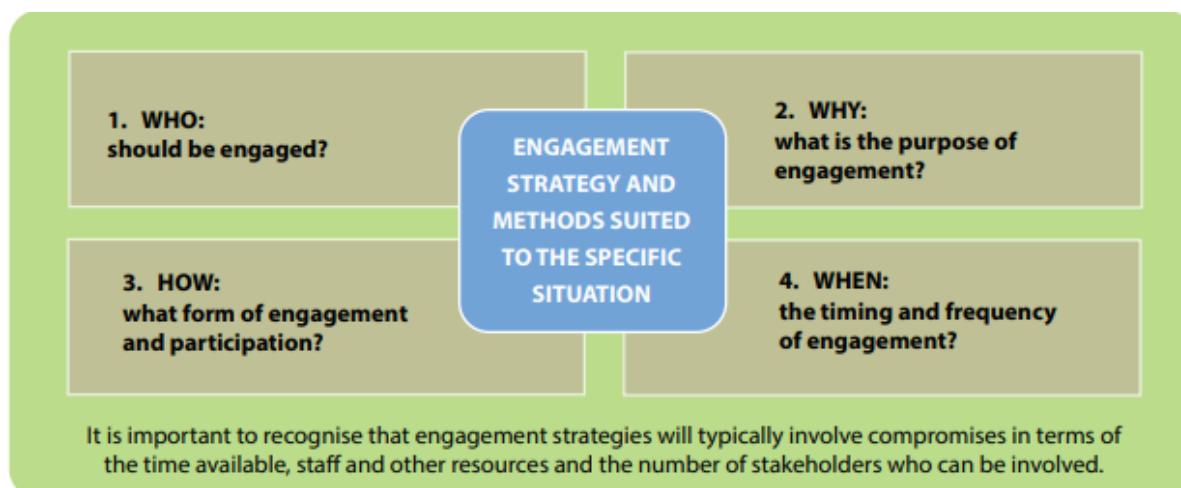
4.1 As set out above, our engagement work is designed to create long-lasting relationship between people and the National Park. We do this so that we can move people along the ladder of stewardship from learning about the National Park, to caring, to taking action (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: The ladder of stewardship**



- 4.2 To create this long-lasting relationship over the next five years of the Communications & Engagement Strategy we will focus on:
- engaging people with the Partnership Management Plan and its delivery;
  - communicating, promoting and connecting people with a National Park that is for everyone; and
  - enabling people to understand and engage with our statutory functions such as planning.
- 4.3 While we are a public body, we are first and foremost a protected landscape and our engagement must have at its heart, the connection between people and this landscape. Only by creating this connection and an understanding of the many benefits the National Park provides, can we ensure its future. We must not only engage, but inspire people to care.
- 5 Where to begin with engagement**
- 5.1 As with many areas of life, the temptation is always to skip the process and get straight to the interesting bit, the actual communications and engagement products to be created. There is a huge and continually evolving array of engagement and communications methods available which, together, form our delivery “toolbox”. However, we must resist the urge to select the means before the ends – that is choosing the method before deciding on the desired audience and outcome.
- 5.2 Any engagement work should be guided by four key questions (see Figure 4):
- **Who** are we trying to engage?
  - **Why:** What is the purpose of the engagement?
  - **How:** What form of engagement is best suited to the who and why?
  - **When** and how often should the engagement happen.

Figure 4: Key questions to guide any engagement work<sup>1</sup>



5.3 As with all of our work as a National Park, our engagement strategy will require compromises in terms of time, staff, other resources, and in the number of stakeholders we can engage with. This makes having a clear strategic focus from Members even more important. We have an experienced, responsive and innovative Communications & Engagement Team, who will use this strategic focus to develop flexible and targeted annual delivery plans that ensure we use the right communications tool for the right stakeholder at the right time.

#### 5.4 **Who?**

The audiences we want to engage with can broadly be broken down into five key groupings:

- **Our communities:** this includes our parishes, businesses, farmers and community groups. It is important to be mindful that working with our parishes enables us to engage with some but not all parts of our communities.
- **Our stakeholders:** This includes landowners, organisational partners such as NGOs, water companies, Natural England, local authorities, LEPs and businesses etc.
- **Our visitors:** This includes visitors who live outside the National Park, residents using their or other parts of the National Park for recreation, recreational user groups etc
- **General public:** This includes anyone interested in the National Park and can include people locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.
- **Policy and decision makers:** This includes politicians and civil servants at Defra, MHCLG and other Government bodies and our local MPs etc

5.5 **Why?** As stated above, the overall aim of our engagement work is to create connections between our key audiences and the National Park, enabling them to know, understand and engage with the National Park and the work of the National Park Authority

5.6 **How?** There is no one perfect way to engage. Because something worked once or for someone else, does not mean it can be translated across and will work in the same way. How we engage must be determined by the who and the why and methods of communication should only be decided on when the who and why have been determined. The medium is NOT the message.

5.7 **When?** Again the timing and frequency of engagement should be determined by the who and why. Sometimes less frequent but more targeted communication can be far more effective.

<sup>1</sup> 'Engagement and participation in protected area management: who, why, how and when?' (2015) [S. Dovers et al](#), *Environmental Science*

## 6 Our Principles for Effective Engagement

- 6.1 It should be noted that:
- we already have a strong set of messages enshrined in our current Communications & Engagement Strategy, which are due for revision in December;
  - we already have all of the necessary communications channels;
  - our Communications & Engagement Team are already operating at full capacity, so we need to set a clear strategic direction and focus on achieving that, mindful that additional activity will require cutbacks elsewhere.
- 6.2 Looking forward to times of both great uncertainty and great change, the Authority faces an ever-increasing demand for engagement that is only going to continue to increase. The guiding principles set out below are designed to enable us to focus and get the most from our engagement and communications work.
- 6.3 Over the last six months we have seen a huge shift in how we communicate and engage with our audiences. We propose to build on this experience through:
- a tighter focus on the core outcomes and messages enshrined in the PMP and already approved by Members;
  - a focused, proactive targeting of those messages to key audiences;
  - greater use of digital channels and less focus on other channels such as physical events, even once the COVID crisis is over;
  - investing in developing new and engaging content;
  - working even more closely with partners both current and new. Including giving voice to those we are not currently successfully representing or reaching.
- 6.4 In order to achieve this, we propose six core engagement principles that will guide the preparation of our new Communications and Engagement Strategy and Public Affairs Strategy:
- 6.5 **Embed equality:** The Glover review has rightly placed great emphasis on the need for National Parks to be National Parks for All. Recent months have also seen movements like Black Lives Matter challenge us to better engage with under-represented groups. Our greatest assets are our platform and our voice. To truly be a National Park for All, in addition to targeted interventions and projects with specific groups, we must open our platforms and widen our collective National Park voice so that everyone can see, hear, feel and create their connection with the South Downs National Park. We commit to giving voice to those that we are not yet successfully representing and reaching.
- 6.6 **Informed by the audience.** We need to understand why and how our audiences connect with the National Park, and support and build on that connection rather than trying to connect everyone in the same way through the same engagement means.
- 6.7 **Collaboration:** We are a partnership-based organisation and we are committed to working with our partners and creatives, both current and new, to find the best communications and engagement solutions. This means knowing when we are best placed to lead and develop new products and when we should forge partnerships to use the products and platforms of others who are already doing it well.
- 6.8 **Sustainable:** As a National Park Authority, we are committed to operating as sustainably as possible. In practice, this means digital first. We will give strong focus to our digital and social media activities, and capabilities in recognition that more people than ever are also engaging with us in this way and that it provides an effective and cost-efficient way of reaching specific audiences. During Covid, engagement through digital means has grown more than ever, which offers us the potential to reach all of our key audiences.
- 6.9 **Flexible and responsive:** We are committed to making better use of emerging technologies and platforms, and to having the capacity and channels to respond quickly and effectively to engagement and communications opportunities and challenges
- 6.10 **Focused and cost effective –** The Communications & Engagement Team (and its budget) are already operating at full capacity. There is no additional resource so our impact must be

increased by greater focus, improved delivery and stronger targeting to address the key messages identified by Members. This means that at times we may need to say no.

- 6.11 **Appendix I** to this paper sets out how this approach has been used to capture how we will engage with parishes going forward. This has been developed through a series of discussions with past and current parish members and aligns with the principles of engagement as set out above.

## 7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The last few months have seen an unprecedented reconnection with nature. This has led to both increasing opportunities and increasing demand for information about the National Park and how to engage with it. This is a huge opportunity for us that we must grasp, but we must do so in a way that does so within the resources available to us. We face a period of great challenge for the environmental agenda as a whole and for National Parks, in particular, so we must focus our communications effort on proactive, sustained and targeted messaging. This may mean that we may not always be able to respond to every request for information and engagement and, at times, will have to say “no”. This focus will strengthen the organisation and increase its positive impact for the National Park. Members are therefore asked to endorse the strategic direction of our engagement work set out in this paper, to ensure we make the best use of our communications resources and to support and provide focus for the development of the new Communications & Engagement and Public Affairs Strategies.

## 8 Options & cost implications

- 8.1 This paper is a step towards the development of the new Communications & Engagement Strategy and the Public Affairs Strategy. The delivery of Communications & Engagement Activities will be costed and budgeted for through the annual budget setting process. Any additional projects will be brought before a relevant Theme Programme Board for funding deliberation.

## 9 Next steps

- 9.1 The Communications & Engagement Manager will bring the full Communications & Engagement Strategy and Public Affairs Strategy to the December NPA for approval.
- 9.2 The Communities Lead and Communications & Engagement Team, working with the Appointed Parish Members, will deliver the communications with parishes as per Figure 4 in **Appendix I**.

## 10 Other Implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Yes:</b> Strategic engagement work, by the NPA in December 2020, when they will be asked to approve the revised Communications &amp; Engagement Strategy and the Public Affairs Strategy.</li> <li>• <b>No:</b> Parish communications.</li> </ul>
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	Not outside of the annual budgeting process.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	This paper sets the strategic focus for our communications and engagement work. The budgets for our communications and engagement work is set through the annual budget setting process and monthly with monthly budget monitoring. All externally commissioned projects follow and are compliant with the Authority’s procurement guidelines.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	None



Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Yes. The paper proposes a number of principles of engagement designed to ensure both equality and equity in engaging with as wide an audience as possible.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	No. The paper proposes a number of principles of engagement designed to ensure both equality and equity in engaging with as wide an audience as possible.
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: All communications & engagement activities are managed to ensure that we are GDPR compliant.
Are there any Sustainability implications based on the 5 principles set out in the SDNPA Sustainability Strategy:	Yes: One of our principles is to be Digital First and to reduce the amount of printed products we produce.

## 11 Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Risks to the Authority's reputation by being unable to deliver on important relevant national issues such as the Glover Response	Medium	High	The Communications & Engagement Strategy helps mitigate the risks to the Authorities reputation and ability to respond quickly and effectively to such external events as the Glover response and the spending review by providing a clear strategic direction from members enabling the prioritisation of work.

### RUTH JAMES

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Appendices	1. Examples of positive engagement
SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive; Director of Countryside Policy and Management; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services, Business Service Manager, Engagement & Events Officer, Learning & Outreach Lead, Cultural Heritage Lead.
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	<a href="#">NPA Public Affairs Report – 19/12/17</a> <a href="#">SDNPA Public Affairs Strategy 2018-20</a> <a href="#">P&amp;R Public Affairs Strategy Report – 21.11.17</a> <a href="#">SDNPA Communications and Engagement Strategy 2012-18</a>

### Appendix I: Parish Communications

- A.1 We have been working separately with past and current Parish Members to establish exactly how we plan to communicate and engage with our 176 parishes in the future. This detail is set out in Figure 5.
- A.2 It is important to again make clear that while our parishes are an important part of our engagement with communities, they do not reach all of our communities and we engage our communities in many ways through our own channels and the channels of others. Our current communication with parishes and wider communities includes:
- **Parish meetings:** run twice annually in Hampshire, East Sussex and West Sussex.
  - **Enewsletter** goes out first week of each month to 6,564 people (up from 4,781) last year. This is sent to all of the parish clerks for them to promote or circulate further as they see fit.
  - **Planning newsletter** goes out 3 times a year to 1350 subscribers and is then sent out separately to all parish clerks.
  - **South Downs View:** Now print 2 editions Spring/Summer (35,000) and Autumn/Winter (15,000). We distribute these through our own events and through Brochure Connect. Including South Downs View and our leaflets, we distributed 130,956 publications through 390 venues in and around the National Park. There has been a special focus on our urban fringe over recent years.
  - **Events:** In 2019/20 we attended 84 events and engaged with 18,000 people. This is an increase from 68 events and 13,000 people the year before and is accounted for by a greater shift to hosting our own targeted events.
  - **Farming:** We run farm breakfasts in all counties. We have worked closely with the local farming communities through our farm clusters. We have developed:
    - the Meet the Farmer plaques;
    - attended farm open days;
    - set them up with a farm cluster website: <http://southdownsfarming.com>
  - **Interpretation:** We are working with a number of parishes/communities on local interpretation, including, for example, interpretation at Idsworth Church and at Hesworth Common in Fittleworth.
  - **Communities of the South Downs:** We are developing a project on how we can support communities in aligning themselves to the National Park. Part of this is aimed at combating negative behaviour such as speeding etc but also looking at things like village signage. We have already provided advice to a number of communities on village signage. This project is ongoing and is being led by our Transport Planning Officer, Alex Pringle with input from the Communities Lead, Interpretation & Place Officer and the Communications & Engagement Manager.
  - **Digital engagement:** Our digital engagement including our website, social media, videos etc is all part of our connection and engagement with local communities:
  - **Media work:** We are focusing a lot more on getting those project success stories out there to local and regional audiences. In the last year we did 113 press releases (up from 62) the year before.
- A.3 Figure 5 (below) sets out how we propose to communicate directly with parish councils and meetings. This is to ensure that we have clear agreement on how we will communicate so that we can plan and resource accordingly. This will form part of our wider communications and engagement with communities.

**Figure 5: How we will communicate and engage with our parishes going forward**

<b>Communications method</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Lead</b>
<b>Reinvigorated parish workshops:</b>	2 a year (may be in person or virtual)	Communities Lead and Events & Engagement Officer working together and with the SDNPA Parish Members and the Director of Countryside Policy & Management
<b>Enewsletter:</b>	Monthly	Produced by Communications & Engagement team and distributed to parish clerks by Communities Lead
<b>Planning newsletter</b>	3 x year	Produced by Communications & Engagement team and distributed to parish clerks by Communities Lead
<b>Parish/Community newsletters:</b> a monthly piece from the Chief Executive covering what is happening in the National Park and what is coming up. For 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.  (please note most community/parish newsletters are not run by the parish councils. The Communities Lead is currently finalising the compilation of a list of these parish/community newsletters)	Monthly or quarterly depending on their schedule	Produced by Communications & Engagement team and distributed to the list of community newsletters by the Communities Lead
<b>Mini updates from Parish Members:</b> Parish Members will be provided with a template so that they can all consistently produce such updates for their parishes within their appointing association area.	Quarterly	Parish Appointed Members to draft and distribute updates to their parishes. (Communications & Engagement team to provide template.)
<b>Attending District/County Local Council Associations Sessions</b>		Parish Appointed Members
<b>Attending Town and Parish Council meetings on request and a proactive approach to attending meetings</b> (it was noted that the West Sussex representatives have a much higher number of parishes and this may not always be possible)		Parish Appointment Members

