

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 16 JULY 2020

Held at 2.15pm using Zoom Video Conferencing and live streamed via YouTube.

Present:

Committee Members: Tim Burr, Helen Burton, Chris Dowling, Chris Henry, Melanie Hunt, Doug Jones (Chair), Michael Lunn, Russell Oppenheimer, Isabel Thurston, Richard Waring and Stephen Whale

Independent Members of the Committee: Tom Fourcade and Carole Nicholson

Ex-officio Members: Ian Phillips and Vanessa Rowlands

Other SDNPA Members: Barbara Holyome and William Meyer

SDNPA Officers: Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive Officer), Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Janice Austin (Legal Advisor), Jill Fisher (BHCC Head of Finance), Alan Brough (Head of Business Services), Robin Parr (Head of Governance) and Catherine Sydenham (Committee Officer).

Also Attended by: Mark Winton (Internal Auditor), Andy Colon (External Auditor), Claire Kerr (Countryside and Policy Manager), Nigel James (Countryside and Policy Manager), Andy Beattie (Countryside and Policy Manager), Anne Rehill (Performance and Project Manager), Nick Heasman (Countryside and Policy Manager), Liz Gent (Project Management Lead), Tanya Hibberd (Performance and Research Lead), Mark Rose (Funding Coordinator) and Mike Hughes (Major Planning Projects and Performance Manager)

OPENING REMARKS

1. The Director of Countryside Policy & Management opened the meeting, welcomed all those present and stated that:
 - Due to the current Coronavirus pandemic the South Downs Centre and Memorial Hall remained closed until further notice, hence this meeting of the South Downs National Park Authority's Policy and Resources Committee was held using the Zoom Cloud Meetings software.
 - 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.
2. The Director of Countryside Policy & Management welcomed the:
 - 5 new Secretary of State Members, Annie Brown, Tim Burr, Melanie Hunt, Baroness Jones of Whitchurch and Stephen Whale.
 - Authority Chair Ian Phillips and Deputy Chair Vanessa Rowlands who were ex-officio members.
 - Independent Members Carole Nicholson and Tom Fourcade who had full participation rights but were non-voting members
 - Non P&R Members Barbara Holyome and William Meyer.

3. The Senior Governance Officer reminded Members of the protocol that would be followed during the meeting.

ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

4. Apologies were received from Annie Brown, Baroness Jones of Whitchurch and Henry Potter.

ITEM 2: ELECTION OF CHAIR

5. The Head of Governance reminded members that the Policy and Resources Committee at its July meeting could choose to elect a Chair and Deputy Chair until the first meeting following the AGM in 2021. The Authority also agreed that the relevant Standing Orders would be suspended to enable Policy and Resources Committee members to nominate themselves for the position of Chair and/or Deputy Chair at the meeting.
6. The Director of Policy and Countryside Management presided over the election process.
7. The Senior Governance Officer read through the names of those present and eligible to stand for the position of Chair and Members were asked to state yes or no if they wished to self-nominate themselves.
8. Doug Jones was the only nomination.
9. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved that Doug Jones was appointed as Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee until the first meeting after the AGM in 2021 or until the end of his appointment as a member, whichever maybe soonest.
10. Doug Jones took the Chair and gave a short acceptance speech.
11. The Committee adjourned for a 5-minute recess.

ITEM 3: ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIR

12. The Head of Governance stated that in the 2017 Governance review the remits of the Policy and Programme and Governance Committees were merged to create the Policy and Resources Committee. Due to its wide ranging remit it was agreed that the Committee could appoint two deputy chairs.
13. The Chair reminded Members that in May 2019 the Authority took a decision in accordance with Standing Order 8.3 of the Policy and Resources Committee that the Committee may appoint up to 2 Deputy Chairs of the Committee.
14. The Senior Governance Officer read through the names of those members present and eligible to vote on whether they wished for 1 or 2 Deputy Chairs to be appointed.
15. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee appoint 2 Deputy Chairs until the first meeting following the Authority AGM in 2021.
16. The election process was presided over by the Chair.
17. The Senior Governance Officer read through the names of those present and eligible to stand for the two positions of Deputy Chair and Members were asked to state yes or no if they wished to self-nominate themselves.
18. Self-Nominations were received from Tim Burr and Russell Oppenheimer.
19. **RESOLVED:** That Tim Burr and Russell Oppenheimer be appointed as Deputy Chairs of the Policy and Resources Committee until the first Policy and Resources Committee meeting after the Authority AGM in 2021 or until the end of their appointment as a member, whichever maybe soonest.

ITEM 4: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

20. No Declarations of Interests were made.

ITEM 5: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 27 FEBRUARY 2020

21. The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 27 February 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

ITEM 6: MATTERS ARISING

22. The Director of Countryside Policy and Management provided an update on the following:
- Sustainable Tourism – the Post Covid-19 Tourism Strategy from the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Department was still awaited. The English National Park experience collection would be refocused on the domestic audience.
 - Climate Change Strategy – Progress had been made on the baseline as to where carbon emissions were coming from (production emissions). Several community projects were now coming forwards.
 - Volunteering – this had been suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic but would be starting to unlock for the winter projects. Volunteers would work within small groups in a bubble.
 - Heath Barn Farm – SDNPA had withdrawn from the negotiations due to the restrictive lease conditions proposed by the National Trust. Work was continuing on finding other suitable accommodation for the Wealden Heath Ranger Team.

ITEM 7: URGENT MATTERS

23. There were none.

ITEM 8: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

24. There were no public speakers.

ITEM 9: NEED FOR PART II EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

25. Officers advised that there was no requirement to consider any item in private session.

ITEM 10: INTERNAL AUDIT – ANNUAL REPORT AND OPINION

26. The Internal Auditor introduced report PR20/21-01 and reminded members of the report content.
27. In response to questions Officers clarified that:
- Throughout the year there were more reasonable than substantial audit opinions given, however, it was in the opinion of the Internal Auditor taking into consideration all the work and findings, management response combined with understanding how the Authority worked that an overall substantial assurance opinion was given for the year ended 31 March 2020.
 - The audit work for procurement and contract management work was suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This audit would be rolled forwards into the 2020-21 work plan.
 - The Audit Plan for 2020/21 would be subject to a comprehensive review due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and would take into account new, currently unknown risks, faced by SDNPA.
28. The recommendation was proposed and seconded.
29. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved to:
- I. Note the content of the Annual Audit Report (2019/20) and the Audit Opinion (2019/20); and

2. To conclude, taking into account the content of the Annual Audit Report, that the Committee is satisfied with the effectiveness of Internal Audit during 2019/20.

ITEM 11: INTERNAL AUDIT – STRATEGY AND ANNUAL AUDIT PLAN 2020/21

30. The Internal Auditor introduced report PR20/21-02 and reminded members of the report content.
31. The Committee commented that:
 1. They would like to see a further information on how much deviation there has been from the previously agreed cyclical Audit Plan.
 2. Any changes made to the Audit Plan could follow the same system as unsatisfactory audit reports in which they are circulated to the Committee Chair and Deputy Chairs as well as the Independent Members.
32. In response to questions officers clarified that:
 - There was little deviation from the cyclical Internal Audit Plan previously approved. There would always be some slippage as priorities came forward but all work was always reconciled back to the original plan.
 - The increased cyber fraud risk arising from increased working from home would be included in the future audit work plan.
 - The Procurement and Contract management audit work was not showing in the plan as it had been rolled forwards on the work plan as uncompleted audit work.
 - The 80% figure of professionally qualified/accredited staff was an industry standard target.
 - The payroll review was to do with the operation of the payroll process and would involve both SDNPA and Brighton and Hove City Council Staff.
 - There are currently 35 days allocated for Audit work and if more are needed Officers would be happy to re-look at, however an increase in audit days would also result in an increased cost to the Authority.
33. An amendment to recommendation 2 was proposed and seconded.
 - *Delegate authority to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Committee to amend the Audit Plan 2020/21 as he considers appropriate to support the Authority as it enters the Covid-19 pandemic recovery phase.*
34. The amendment to the recommendation was agreed.
35. The revised recommendation was proposed and seconded.

RESOLVED: That the Committee resolved to

1. Approve the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan for 2020/21.
 2. Delegate authority to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Committee to amend the Annual Audit Plan 2020/21 as the Chief Finance Officer considers appropriate to support the Authority as it enters the Covid 19 pandemic recovery phase.
 3. Note that any amendments made to the Annual Audit Plan will be reported to the Committee at the appropriate time.
36. Tom Fourcade left the meeting

ITEM 12: EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN ADDENDUM FOR COVID-19 RISK 2019/20

37. The External Auditor introduced report PR20/21-03 and reminded members of the report content.

38. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- All auditors are dealing with new ways of working as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic and have developed new ways of getting valid forms of evidence. Every effort was being made to keep the audit work to time and within the fee quoted.
 - The delay to the audit work in 2019 was due to the end of year pension fund using a Quarter 3 estimate. The 2020 audit work would use the year end position which should alleviate any delay to the audit conclusion.
39. The recommendation was proposed and seconded.
40. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved to note the External Audit Plan addendum 2019/20.

ITEM 13: ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT AND UPDATED LOCAL CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

41. The Head of Governance introduced report PR20/21-04 and reminded members of the report content.
42. The Committee commented that:
- Within the Governance Framework it would like to see references to work to improve diversity within the organisation as well more information on equalities and safeguarding.
43. In response to questions Officers clarified that:
- The Annual Governance Statement and updated Local Code of Corporate Governance needed to accompany the year end accounts and therefore there was not sufficient time to bring back for Committee approval. Officers therefore suggested to amend recommendation 1 to read:
 - *Approve and Annual Governance Statement for 2019-20, subject to changes agreed at the Committee, to accompany the Authority's Statement of Accounts; and.*
 - The Recommendation was proposed and seconded.
44. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved to:
1. Approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2019-20, subject to the changes agreed at the Committee, to accompany the Authority's Statement of Accounts; and
 2. Note the updated Local Code of Corporate Governance
45. The Committee adjourned for a 10-minute break.
46. Helen Burton left the meeting.

ITEM 14: THEME PROGRAMME BOARDS UPDATE

47. The Director of Countryside, Policy and Management introduced the Countryside and Policy Managers who gave a presentation on the 5 Theme Programme Boards: Landscape and Biodiversity; Cultural Heritage; Sustainable Access; Connecting People and Communities; and Sustainable Economy and Tourism.
48. The Chair thanked the Countryside Policy Managers and the teams behind them for their cross departmental working involving a range of partners.
49. Committee commented that:
- They congratulated the officers for the excellent presentation given.
 - The quick response to the Covid-19 pandemic was to be commended.

50. In response to these and other questions Officers clarified that:

- That in relation to the Cultural Heritage Board there were projects in the pipeline relating to climate change. Work was underway with partners to learn how to conserve historic buildings using techniques from the past.
- In relation to supporting local business/farmers the Authority was seeking funding to establish a 'South Downs Enterprise Group'. Businesses had previously reported that in relation to COVID-19 sometimes it not just funding that they need but also help with mentoring, marketing, supply chains and publicity.
- Prior to the 24 September 2020 P&R Committee an all Member workshop would be held to discuss the new normal and how the Covid-19 pandemic would help or hinder in achieving the key cross-cutting issues in the new PMP : Nature Recovery Climate Change, Health and Wellbeing and Rural Economy.
- The Access team engages with local Rail and Bus Partnerships as part of core work.
- The Mosaic 2 project, to continue the work from the Mosaic Project to encourage black, Asian and minority ethnic communities to visit to visit National Parks was being developed and when ready would appear in the Corporate Plan.
- Work was underway on Natural Flood Management Guide and it would contain information relevant to local geography and typography.

51. Chris Dowling Left the meeting

ITEM 15: CONTRACT FOR BAT SURVEYS AT WEST DEAN, SINGLETON AND COCKING TUNNELS

52. The Head of Business Services introduced report PR20/21-05 and reminded members of the report content. The Countryside and Policy Manager (Western Area) explained the long-term aspirations of the Centurion Way and explained that when Planning Permission for the section from West Dean to Cocking was granted in October 2019 the Planning Committee asked whether further work could be done to see if the West Dean tunnel could be opened up. Since all three tunnels are used by bats and the northern two form an SAC (European Site) the proposal is to undertake surveys of all the tunnels. The work was programmed within the Access Theme Programme Board, with funding earmarked. No structural surveys have been undertaken so it remains possible that even if bat survey data suggest that the tunnels could be used further work would be needed.

53. Members had a wide ranging discussion on both the benefits and drawbacks of conducting the surveys to ascertain whether it was environmentally possible and financially viable to open up the tunnels.

54. The Committee commented that:

- Although they were supportive of exploring the possibility of opening up the tunnels £120,000 was a significant sum of money to invest at a very uncertain time. Further no structural surveys had been completed and these could subsequently reveal problems which could rule out use of the tunnels on safety grounds. Planning permission has been granted for a route that avoided the need for using the tunnels. However, the Committee recognised that by conducting the surveys it would be known for certain whether it was possible to open the tunnels up in the future.
- In the event of a conflict between the National Park purposes the Sandford Principle applies here with greater weight being added to protecting the bat population than opening the tunnels for recreational use.
- The contract tender should be framed in such a way that if after year 1 there was sufficient data to rule out use of the tunnels there would be no need for the year 2 and

3 surveys with no subsequent charges made by the contractor.

55. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- The Sandford Principle may apply and it was possible that some but not all of the tunnels would be deemed suitable to be opened. Each tunnel would be treated as its own project.
- The consent of Natural England was needed and work would not commence without it. Natural England had indicated that it would take 3 years to build up a robust evidence base on use which was why the 3 timescale was indicated however, if after the first year it became clear that 1 tunnel was not feasible then the survey on that tunnel would cease hence reducing the cost.
- Humans can coexist with bats and there were examples in the Peak District where tunnels had been opened up however, it was dependent on the number of species and their abundance. However, the Singleton and Cocking Tunnels are designated as a Special Area of Conservation under the Habitats Directive and are therefore of international significance for bat populations, and this part of West Sussex is becoming known for its variety and abundance of bats as shown by the Arundel bypass case. The data collected will be useful for other National Parks, such as the North York Moors, who were also considering opening up tunnels where bats were known to roost.

56. A revision to recommendation 1 was proposed and seconded:

- *‘Subject to the caveats approved at the meeting, approve the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor to undertake Bat surveys at West Dean, Singleton and Cocking Tunnels’*

57. The Senior Governance Officer asked Members in turn to vote using their voice to confirm whether they were in support, against or abstaining on the revised recommendation. The Recommendation was carried.

58. **RESOLVED:** The Committee Resolved to:

1. Subject to the caveats approved at the meeting approve the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor to undertake Bat Surveys at West Dean, Singleton and Cocking Tunnels.
2. Approve delegation of Authority to the Chief Executive to award contracts for the above, following a competition process carried out under the terms of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

59. Ian Phillips and Vanessa Rowlands left the meeting.

60. The Chair informed the Committee that Items 16-20 had been pre-circulated for Members comments and the comments raised had been incorporated into the reports presented. The Chair informed the Committee that the end of year review reports were presented to the Committee each year and he thanked Officers for their time into putting together comprehensive reports.

61. The Chair asked that members helped promote the Annual review, highlighted that the Sustainable Communities Projects showed a good spread of projects across the park and the review of Planning Performance covered both analysis of ‘host authority’ arrangements and in-house decisions but also showed the role that planning can play in delivering the Partnership Management Plan.

ITEM 16: QUARTER 4 PROJECT PERFORMANCE REPORT

62. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved to receive and note the Quarter 4 Corporate Performance and Project Performance report.

ITEM 17: YEAR END CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE

63. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved to:
1. Receive and note the year end Corporate Performance & Project Performance report
 2. Receive and note the Annual Review

ITEM 18: ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FUND

64. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved to note the year-end position of the Sustainable Communities Fund

ITEM 19: ANNUAL REVIEW OF PLANNING PERFORMANCE: Financial year 2019/20

65. The Major Planning Projects and Performance Manager gave a brief overview of the process for Section 106 legal obligations.
66. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved to
1. receive and note the Annual Review of Planning Performance

ITEM 20: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

67. The Head of Governance introduced report PR20/21-09 and reminded members of the report content.
68. In response to Questions Officers advised members:
- The Risk Register was kept under regular review and was regularly updated with any new information.
69. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note the Corporate Risk Register as at July 2020

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 5.55pm

Signed _____