

Planning Position Statement by the South Downs National Park Authority during COVID-19 Pandemic

This statement by the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) sets out our response to help local businesses during the COVID-19 Pandemic in line with our socio-economic duty. It was discussed with Members at a workshop on 17 August 2020 and with the Agents' Forum on 30 September 2020. It will be kept under review as we adjust to the new normal and prepare for a green and local recovery.

Purpose:

- Identify key priority sectors of the local economy that Planning may assist.
- Produce a time limited Planning Position Statement for these unprecedented times to help us build a sustained and green recovery for the National Park without harm to its special qualities. It will be reviewed regularly after its practical implementation.
- It will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications both by the National Park Authority (NPA) and local authorities through hosted arrangements¹.

Context of note:

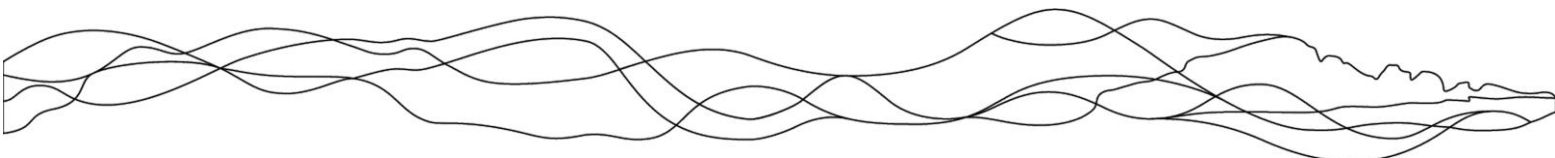
- National response to Covid-19 and the White Paper: Planning for the Future.
- Duty of National Park Authorities: To seek to foster the economic and social well-being of the local communities within the National Park.
- Partnership Management Plan Outcome (10): A diverse, sustainable, dynamic economy which is positively linked to the special qualities of the National Park. Specifically, (10.1) To strengthen and support sustainably managed land-based industries and local enterprise; (10.2) To increase awareness and desirability of the South Downs as a special place to visit; and (10.3) To establish the South Downs as an exemplar in sustainable tourism.
- Partnership Management Plan Outcome (7) To develop initiatives which enable local communities and individuals to improve health and wellbeing.
- Local Plan objective: To protect and provide for local businesses including farming, forestry and tourism that are broadly compatible with and relate to the landscapes and special qualities of the National Park.

Core Policy SDI of the Local Plan states that 'When considering development proposals that accord with relevant policies in this Local Plan and with National Park purposes, the Authority will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development. It will work with applicants to find solutions to ensure that those development proposals can be approved without delay, unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise.' This Position Statement follows on from this policy.

Priority sectors of the local economy

Studies carried out for the NPA have identified the following sectors of the National Park Authority to be at greatest risk under the pandemic:

¹ Winchester District Council, East Hampshire District Council, Chichester District Council, Horsham District Council and Lewes District Council



- Land-based industries include agriculture, forestry and fishing. An environment shaped by centuries of farming is one of the National Park's special qualities and 85% of its area is farmed.
- The visitor economy including visitor attractions and visitor accommodation is at greatest risk during the pandemic. The visitor economy is linked to both the second purpose of national parks and our socio-economic duty. With 39 million day visits each year to the South Downs with an annual spend of £333 million² it is a vital part of our economy.
- The knowledge sector includes businesses where the production of goods and services is based primarily upon knowledge intensive services such as advanced manufacturing. Almost a third of the National Park's businesses are in this sector and it is classified as medium risk in terms of the current economic climate.

In line with our socio-economic duty and given the impact of Covid-19 on smaller business with less 'back up', we will prioritise micro (fewer than 10 employees) and small (10 to 49 employees) businesses operating in these three sectors.

I. Planning process

In regard to small and micro businesses in the above named sectors the Authority will:

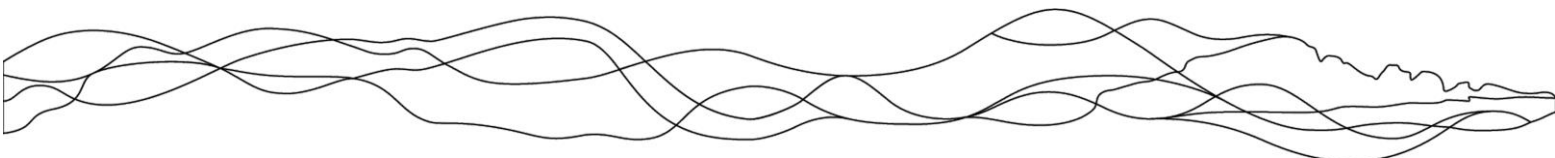
- a) Prioritise the validation and determination of planning applications arising from the pandemic
- b) Prioritise the discharge of conditions to allow development to commence and seek details up front for planning applications arising from the pandemic
- c) Consider the requirement for certain studies such as noise assessments and transport assessment, which cannot be carried out during the pandemic and consider the use of post-commencement conditions so that the studies can take place after permission is granted. We will provide a standard template for S106 legal agreements to address this as necessary
- d) Work pro-actively with businesses which are currently applying for grants or funding that must have planning permissions in place prior to submission of their full funding application
- e) Work pro-actively with the Agents' Forum to identify further opportunities for assistance

2. Financial factors

In regard to small and micro businesses in the above named sectors the Authority may consider as matter of discretion to:

- a) Provide free pre-application advice (one meeting followed up with written advice)

² <https://www.nationalparks.uk/students/whatisanationalpark/factsandfigures>



- b) Exceptionally waive monitoring fees for Section 106 legal agreements

3. Policy interpretation

There are a number of Local Plan policies that are particularly relevant to small and micro businesses in land-based industries, the visitor economy and the knowledge sector. For example, many people have worked from home using outbuildings. Paragraph 7.96 of the supporting text for Policy SD31: Extensions to Existing Dwellings and Provision of Annexes and Outbuildings states that ‘the use of outbuildings to support home working and home-based businesses will generally be supported where this does not involve a change of use of the main dwelling or have an adverse impact on the residential amenities of adjoining residents or the landscape of the National Park.’ It is important to remember that all development plan policies will be taken into account when determining applications. The Authority may consider as matter of discretion to show temporary flexibility in regard to the following aspects of the following Local Plan policies:

- a) Policy SD34 Sustaining the Local Economy: Add the ‘knowledge sector’ to the list of key sectors in criterion 1(a).
- b) SD35 Employment Land: No longer require marketing evidence over a period of at least 12 months currently for a change of use from an employment use (B use) to another commercial use (non-B use). The marketing requirements will stay in place for change of use from employment to residential.
- c) SD36 Town & Village Centres & SD37 Development in Town & Village Centres: Consider positively all applications for commercial uses in our town and village centres that will increase footfall, with less regard to specific Use Classes definitions and more regard to likely impacts.

For further help for businesses please look at the following page of our website:
<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/coronavirus-covid-19-update/supporting-businesses/information-for-businesses-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

08 October 2020

