



**South Downs**  
National Park Authority

**Agenda Item 10**  
**Report NPA20/21-10**

Report to	<b>South Downs National Park Authority</b>
Date	<b>15 October 2020</b>
By	<b>Communications &amp; Engagement Manager</b>
Title of Report <b>Note</b>	<b>Update on the Wild Chalk and Secrets of the Heath events.</b>

**Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to note the feedback on the Authority's Wild Chalk and Secrets of the Heath events**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Covid-19 has had an impact on all of our lives, and for the Authority's communications and engagement work, one of the key impacts was the immediate halt to our extensive programme of face-to-face events.
- 1.2 In 2019, we attended 83 events and engaged with 18,000 people face-to-face. In addition to a full events programme, in March 2020 we were also due to hold a series of events to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Park.
- 1.3 Once it became clear that all of our events programme, including our anniversary celebration events would have to be cancelled for the foreseeable future, we set about identifying ways that we could engage with key audiences to connect them with the National Park in a time when they needed it more than ever. This led to the development of two virtual festivals over the summer period, the Wild Chalk Festival and Secrets of the Heath (which was delivered as part of HLF-funded Heathlands Reunited Project).
- 1.4 The festivals were designed to deliver on all five of our Communications & Engagement Objectives as set out in our current Communications & Engagement Strategy:
  - **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 hard to reach 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. Wild Chalk Festival**

- 2.1 The approach taken was to take a rather giant leap into the world of virtual events and decided to replace our one-day Wild Chalk event, run in partnership with Brighton & Hove City Council, with a six-day festival to celebrate all things chalk downland.

- 2.2 The aim of the festival was to raise awareness of, and connect people with, our chalk grassland landscape through live broadcasts from our rangers and expert speakers. We targeted the Festival at urban areas near chalk grassland including Brighton & Hove, Eastbourne, Winchester and Chichester.
- 2.3 Each day of the festival had a theme, such as Busy Bees and Amazing Grazing, and included short films, “Facebook lives”, storytime, “Instagram lives” and Pinterest boards that provided lots of activities and crafts for people to join in. We wanted to make the festival appear as friendly as possible, and to recreate the feeling that you were engaging directly with SDNPA and BHCC rangers, and our invited partners, as you would at the real event. This was achieved mainly through the “Facebook lives” with SDNPA staff, and partners talking to the public in real time and answering questions live as they came in.
- 2.4 In 2019 the face-to-face event had attracted 1,700 people, mostly from the local community around East Brighton Park. The virtual festival reached just over 83,000 people of whom just over 15,000 were in Brighton and just under 15,000 were in London, with thousands also joining from Eastbourne, Worthing, Winchester, Portsmouth, Crawley, Bognor and Horsham.

### 3. Secrets of the Heath

- 3.1 Secrets of the Heath has been an important delivery vehicle for the community engagement targets for the Heathlands Reunited HLF project. The problems facing delivery of the Secrets of the Heath this year were compounded by many of our NGO partners having key staff on furlough.
- 3.2 The event kicked off with the launch of the new sculpture trail, with the seven short videos of the “sculpture dash” being viewed over 15,000 times to date. This sculpture dash involved SDNPA staff and partner staff from each site with a sculpture, and was an excellent way to connect people with the seven very different and unique heathland sites, receiving only positive comments and likes. We are now seeing a number of requests for the sculpture trail map through reception and our website.
- 3.3 The rest of the weekend’s activities consisted of a programme of live and pre-recorded events and Pinterest boards, that again, were very well received.
- 3.4 The weekend normally attracts around 2,000 people. The virtual event saw similar numbers to the Wild Chalk Festival with us engaging with c83,500 people.

### 4. Next steps

- 4.1 What is clear is that the virtual events have enabled us to reach a much larger audience and to appeal to our urban fringe and wider urban areas. We are taking learning from both virtual events to feed into the development of our updated Communications & Engagement Strategy, which will be put before the NPA meeting in December.

### 5. Other Implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	No – any events, virtual or face-to-face are funded from the core Communications & Engagement budget set as part of the annual budget setting process
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	The virtual festivals reached c162,500 people, representing a greater number engaged for the spend.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the	No

proposal?	
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Yes. We are looking at the ability of virtual events to enable us to reach and engage with audiences that we are currently not reaching and that are traditionally under-represented in the National Park.  The virtual sessions outlined above took place using well established platforms, which have in built accessibility features to support the widest engagement from all groups.
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?	Risk assessments are carried out for all events.
Are there any Data Protection implications?	No. Members of the public were able to engage in these events using existing accounts and passwords. All monitoring data received through our digital channels is anonymised.
Are there any Sustainability implications based on the 5 principles set out in the SDNPA Sustainability Strategy?	Yes – going virtual enables us to reach people without having large numbers of people travel to an actual event.

## 6. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

- 6.1 As this is an update paper there are no direct risks arising from it. Each individual event includes a risk assessment in which the additional risks associated with activities being delivered are considered.

### RUTH JAMES

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Appendices None  
SDNPA Consultees Chief Executive; Monitoring Officer.  
External Consultees None  
Background Documents **None**

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