



South Downs
National Park Authority

Agenda Item 8
Report NPA20/21-08

Report to	South Downs National Park Authority
Date	15 October 2020
By	Authority Chair
Title of Report Note	Authority Chair Update

Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to note the update from the Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 I have prepared this paper to inform and update Members on my activities since the last NPA meeting in July.
- 1.2 Firstly, an apology in that I have not managed to meet up with all recently appointed Members in person, but I do aim to do this before too much longer. I have been liaising closely with Vanessa as Deputy Chair and I know that she has been having some very useful meetings with several of you. I think it is especially important under the present circumstances to take opportunities when we can to have face to face meetings to supplement and enrich our increasingly zoom-dominated lives. With this in mind, I am exploring and encouraging ways in which we can interact informally rather than simply through structured, formal events.

2. Defra

- 2.1 I have attended two meetings with Defra, together with Chairs of other Arm's Length Bodies including Natural England, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency and National Parks and hosted by senior civil servants. These have provided information and updates on post Brexit expectations, ELM and the Future Farming and Countryside Programme (FFCP) and delivery of the 25 year plan. Defra resources have been preoccupied with COVID 19 implications and significant churn of staff, resulting in programme slippage, but there also appear to be signs of changes of emphasis.
- 2.2 The government response to Glover is awaited but there are indications that a more streamlined, centrist and data driven approach to national landscape management is being promoted, which may not bode well for national park authorities. Nature Recovery Network pilot schemes are being run in five county based areas, rather than geographical areas as defined by designated landscapes. There are strong indications that the environmental benefits associated with ELMS are being weakened in favour of a Sustainable Farming Incentive which may largely replicate the existing Basic Payments Scheme, rather than making payments for ecosystem services over and above normal farming practice. The Agriculture and Fisheries Bill is working through Parliament, but the Environment Bill is on hold probably until next year.

3. TfSE

- 3.1 In July, I became a co-opted, voting Member of the Transport for South East Shadow Board to represent the South East Protect Landscapes (all AONBs and National Parks in SE England). The Board approved the final version of the TfSE Strategy for submission to Government, following updates relating to predominantly supportive consultation responses and the implications of COVID 19. This was to accompany a request for statutory status for TfSE.
- 3.2 The Board also received updates on proposals for five area transport studies - Outer Orbital Area; Inner Orbital Area; South West Area; South Central Area and South East Area together with a freight, logistics and gateways strategy. The Outer Orbital Study is to go ahead, while the others await funding from government.
- 3.3 Subsequently, TfSE has been advised by Government that it will receive a grant of £1.225m, which will fund some of the area studies, although its application for statutory status is not supported at this time, pending the local government devolution white paper, which is itself now on hold. A bid has been submitted for funding for TfSE for 3 years under the CSR, which of course is also on hold. The next meeting of the TfSE is on 22 October.

4. Coast to Capital LEP

- 4.1 I have attended two C2C Leaders' meetings where the emphasis has been on the impact of COVID on the local economy, in particular the major disruption and downturn associated with the Gatwick Diamond. There is emphasis on the importance of the tourist economy, the horticulture and viticulture sectors and the ICT / data sector as growth areas and key drivers, particularly towards the coast. Increasing unemployment is foreseen post-furlough but there is a recognition that market towns, suburbs and smaller settlements may get an economic boost from more people working from home and city centre businesses seeking to relocate to smaller, cheaper premises outside the London conurbation. House prices and affordable housing supply remain a significant barrier for a younger demographic and key workers.

5. Other external meetings

- 5.1 I participated as a panellist in an online Climate Change conference organised by Gillian Keegan MP (Chichester). The session covered a number of questions from an audience of about 80, and the feedback I received for the National Park's initiatives and aspirations were very positive.
- 5.2 I have had useful introductory meetings with Andrew Griffith MP (Arundel) and Damien Hinds MP (East Hants) and have a number of meetings planned with other local MPs to discuss matters of common interest and to promote the Park Authority's position on local, regional and national issues.
- 5.3 I have also embarked on a series of meetings with local authorities and have had very productive sessions with Lucille Thompson (Leader of Winchester) and with Paul Marshall from West Sussex (together with Vanessa and other officers and members from both organisations). Our recently published PANN strategy is being well-received and may be usefully plugging a nature recovery gap in other local authority's strategies, enabling a commonly supported approach beyond the Park's boundaries. I have meetings with other local authorities planned over coming months.
- 5.4 Other meetings I have attended include a briefing session with Highways England, an introductory meeting with National Parks England (NPE) Chairs, a NPE Board Meeting and a National Parks Partnership AGM.

6. Internal Meetings

- 6.1 In July, Vanessa and I received a briefing on the Authority's very effective communications activities and I have met with Roni Craddock and Claire Kerr to discuss the PANN strategy. I have also taken a particular interest in contributing to the Authority's response

to the Government's National Tree Strategy consultation and to our evolving Design SPD. Vanessa, Russell and I have also convened as Members of the Appointments, Management and Standards Committee to consider governance issues and to conduct an interim review of the Chief Executive's performance – for the avoidance of doubt, this was met with approval. I would note that I have also been formally appraised by Vanessa, in conjunction with inputs from others, and the results have been advised to Defra. I will be making arrangements, together with Vanessa, to have appraisal meetings with all Members in due course.

- 6.2 I managed to join new Members in their third and final Induction Session and I am very impressed at the enthusiastic and informed contributions that they are already making to the work of the Authority. I appreciate the active Member participation in committee meetings, some of which I have lurked on as an observer, your involvement in key working groups and panels, and also the well-attended workshops on our responses to the Planning White Paper consultation and a review of the COVID-related implications for the Park of the 'New Normal'.
- 6.3 I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to all the many Members and staff who have eased me into my role as Chair and Vanessa's as Deputy, and provided us with some very substantial support and briefings. This is a position that is demanding, but also very rewarding, especially in such a strong and enthusiastic organisation which only aims to do good. I look forward to us facing many challenges and delivering even better.

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Appendices	None
SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive; Monitoring Officer; Head of Governance.
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	N/A

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