

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 24 SEPTEMBER 2020

Held at 1.30pm using Zoom Video Conferencing and live streamed via the SDNPA webcast portal.

Present:

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

Independent Members of the Committee: Tom Fourcade and Carole Nicholson.

SDNPA Officers: Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive Officer), Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Tim Slaney (Director of Planning) Louise Reed (Monitoring Officer), Jill Fisher (Deputy Section 151 Officer), 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- Eastern Area), Anne Rehill (Performance and Project Manager), Nick Heasman (Countryside and Policy Manager – Central Downs), Liz Gent (Project Management Lead), Tanya Hibberd (Performance and Research Lead), Ruth James (Communication and Engagement Manager), Veronica Craddock (Infrastructure and Environment Strategy Lead) and Kelly Porter (Major Projects Lead).

OPENING REMARKS

70. The Chair 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.

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

ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

72. Apologies were received from Chris Henry, Ian Phillips (ex-officio) and Vanessa Rowlands (ex officio).

ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

73. Annie Brown declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in item 9 as a farmer/land owner at Truleigh Hill.

74. Helen Burton declared a public service interest in item 8 as a member of Eastbourne Borough Council.

ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 16th JULY 2020

75. The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 16 July 2020 were approved, subject to the following amendments, as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
- Minute 54, 3rd Bullet, insert the words 'or otherwise' after tunnels, so that the bullet reads *'The contract tender should be framed in such a way that if after year 1 there was sufficient data to rule out the tunnels, or otherwise, there would be no need for the year 2 and 3 surveys with no subsequent charges made by the contractor'*.

ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

76. The Director of Countryside Policy and Management provided an update on the following:
- Item 15 - The contractors would be surveying both the bats and the structural condition of the tunnels with work starting in winter 2020. The southernmost tunnel would be the first surveyed.
 - Minute 50 – Work was progressing on the establishment of the South Downs Business Enterprise using a model similar to the already established group in the Surrey Hills. The feasibility study was completed and being reviewed. SDNPA was looking at funding sources to support the PMP delivery both as an individual applicant and jointly with National Parks England.
77. The Chair updated the Committee that the further information asked for on how much deviation there was from the previously agreed Cyclical Audit Plan, had been sent to Committee Members on 9th September 2020 with no comments or questions raised.

ITEM 5: URGENT MATTERS

78. The Chair informed the Committee that there was one item of urgent business, which was published on the Authority's website and circulated to all members of the Committee on 23rd September 2020. The urgent business relates to an addendum to the Annual Governance Statement that was approved by the Committee at its July meeting to reflect additional guidance received. The Chair informed the Committee that there were special circumstances that required the Committee to take this as an urgent item of business, these circumstances being that as the Annual Governance Statement was required to be approved in advance of the Statement of Accounts which would be being approved by this Committee at its November meeting, this would be the Committee's last opportunity to consider and approve the Addendum within the available timeframe. The newly revised national deadline for approval of the Statement of Accounts was 30th November 2020 and the Annual Governance Statement, together with the Addendum, would be required by the auditors to complete the audit prior to this deadline. The Chair informed the Committee that the urgent business would be taken between items 10 and 11.

ITEM 6: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

79. The Chair advised the Committee that there were 2 members of the public who had requested to speak and that they would be heard directly at the start of item 8 on which they wished to speak:
- Mark Langridge-Kemp the Head of Property Delivery and Compliance at Eastbourne Borough Council
 - Charlie Russ from Aecom who was the consultant/agent for Eastbourne Borough Council.

ITEM 7: NEED FOR PART II EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

ITEM 8: EASTBOURNE DOWNLAND ESTATE WHOLE ESTATE PLAN

81. Mark Langridge-Kemp addressed the Committee as the Head of Property, Delivery and Compliance at Eastbourne Council.
82. Charlie Russ addressed the Committee as the agent/consultant for Eastbourne Borough Council.
83. The Major Projects Lead introduced report PR20/21-11 and reminded members of the report content.
84. The Chair informed the Committee that this was an unusual position to be considering the work of another Local Authority and in this situation the Chair would use his discretion to allow the Public Speakers to respond to questions where SDNPA Officers were not able to, or where the Public Speakers input would aid the Committee's deliberations.
85. The Committee commented that:
 - The Eastbourne Downland Whole Estate Plan process was to be commended and an impressive document had been produced.
 - They were pleased that tenants had been engaged in the Whole Estate Plan process (WEP).
 - The WEP highlighted that local community and public benefit was an important goal of WEP's generally.
86. In response to questions Officers clarified that:
 - There was always a fine balance to strike between public access and biodiversity enhancement which this WEP did well.
 - When Eastbourne Borough Council Cabinet approved the WEP they also prioritised the action plan which would have an ongoing review process.
 - SDNPA plays an active part in the Heritage Coast Partnership which provides a useful mechanism to ensure that future developments and the visitor offers at Beachy Head, Birling Gap and the Seven Sisters are complementary.
87. In response to questions the Public Speakers clarified that:
 - When Eastbourne Borough Council was considering the potential sale of its Downland Estate, a Public Referendum was held, with the result being not to proceed with the disposal of the asset. This led to the commitment to develop a WEP and there were currently no further plans for Eastbourne Borough Council to consider disposal of the Downland.
 - The decision to remove the farm buildings at Black Robin Farm was agreed in conjunction with the new farm tenant who had no need for them. The income from the holiday lets would be ring fenced for educational programmes.
 - Visitor Numbers were calculated using the Outdoor Recreation Valuation Tool (ORval) which allowed for a value to be calculated for the Natural Capital Accounts.
 - The WEP was produced prior to the Covid-19 outbreak but consulted on once the pandemic lock down was in place.
88. The Chair reminded the Committee that an endorsed WEP would become a material consideration within the planning system as explained in the report.
89. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved to:
 - I. Endorse the Eastbourne Downland Estate Whole Estate Plan

ITEM 9: PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN THEMATIC UPDATE – PEOPLE AND NATURE NETWORK

90. The Chair explained to the Committee that there were 4 cross cutting themes which emerged as priorities for the SDNPA through the newly approved Partnership Management Plan (PMP): Nature Recovery; Climate Change; Health and Diversity and Rural Economy. Progress on these issues would be monitored by the Committee and would involve external partners where possible. The focus of this item was the Nature Recovery theme.
91. The Infrastructure and Environment Strategy Lead introduced report PR20/21-12 reminded members of the report content and gave a presentation.
92. The Committee commented that:
 - The People and Nature Network (PANN) received excellent and widespread media coverage when it was launched in August.
93. In response to questions officers clarified that:
 - A broad cross section of Stakeholders was a key part of the work which lies behind the PANN. There was a particular focus on a bottom up approach with local knowledge from local people.
 - Evaluation would focus on the progress made within each of the twelve priority areas for natural capital investment.
 - The terminology within the PANN wasn't necessarily the language that would be used to communicate with the public, as the framework was aimed at decision makers. Work in some of the natural capital areas will be led by SDNPA and in others partners will lead, with SDNPA having an overall overview.
94. Helen Burton left the meeting.
95. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved to
 - I. To note the report
96. The Committee adjourned for a 10-minute break.

ITEM 10: ENGAGEMENT: OUR STRATEGIC FOCUS GOING FORWARDS

97. The Communications and Engagement Manager introduced report PR20/21-13 and reminded members of the report content.
98. The Committee commented that:
 - It was important for SDNPA as a whole to understand why people do and don't connect with the offer of the National Park.
 - There was huge health and wellbeing value in people getting outside to have a walk in the fresh air, and social media could be a good way to encourage people to go further and find new places away from the hot spots.
 - The New Forest National Park had a good app and further consideration on the cost and advice around the development of SDNPA apps would be welcomed.
 - Positive feedback had been received on the Ranger social media activity over the summer.
99. In response to questions officers clarified that:
 - 2-way communication was vital for success. Inward communication came from work with partners, residents and local communities in an array of different formats such as Citizens Panel, Farmers' Breakfasts etc. Much of the raw intelligence was not shared with members directly, though anonymised information could be provided if requested.
 - The measures of success used when looking at a social media campaign include the level

of engagement as well as the numbers reached.

- The campaign 'Your National Park' involved a champion for each of the ten Outcomes within the PMP. The campaign had been temporarily paused due to Covid-19 but work would be beginning again. The creation of champions for different purposes added enormous value to campaigns.
- There were 176 parishes within the SDNP boundary and work was beginning to create content for all parish magazines. The intention was that each publication contains an article from the SDNPA Chief Executive.
- The Authority had a Social Media Policy with which all Officers of the Authority have to comply making it difficult to add much of a personal slant to the corporate messages. The Chief Executive had his own personal twitter account but clearly stated the opinions are all his own and not those of the Authority.

100. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved 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

URGENT BUSINESS: ADDENDUM TO THE 2019/20 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

101. The Head of Governance introduced report PR20/21-18 and reminded members of the report content.

102. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved to:

1. Approve the Addendum set out in Appendix I to be added to the Annual Governance Statement for 2019-20 to accompany the Authority's Statement of Accounts.

ITEM 11: QUARTER 1 BUDGET MONITORING

103. The Deputy Section 151 Officer introduced report PR20/21-14 and reminded members of the report content. The Deputy Section 151 Officer corrected an error within para 4.1 of the report presented which refers to an increase in reserves which should be a decrease in reserves. The paragraph should read as follows:

- *By continuously identifying and explaining variances against budgets, the Authority can identify risks, changes and new resource requirements at the earliest opportunity. An above budget variance at the end of the financial year could **decrease** reserve levels and have implications for the Medium Term Financial Strategy of the Authority.*

104. The Committee commented that:

- Ahead of the next Committee up to date financial information should be circulated to Committee Members to provide an accurate view of the impact that Covid-19 was having on the Authority finances.

105. In response to questions Officers clarified that:

- If there was a decrease in staff turnover from the estimated 14% net staff turnover budgeted for this would result in the salary budget being overspent at the end of the financial year.
- The planning income budget had been raised by £200k and was now estimated to be back to pre Covid-19 levels. It was anticipated to be a temporary setback due to major sites within the Local Plan coming forward for Planning Permission.
- The Authority was being encouraged to either defer or to have phased CIL payment plans and therefore there would be no Government penalties.

106. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved to:

1. Note the 2020/21 revenue forecast position as at month 4 of a net £178,000 above budget variance.
2. Note the 2020/21 capital forecast position as at month 4 of a zero budget variance.
3. Note the reserves position as at month 4.
4. Note the Treasury Management overview and position as at month 4.

ITEM 12: EXTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT AND SECTOR UPDATE

107. The External Auditor introduced report PR20/21-15 and reminded members of the report content.

108. The Deputy Section 151 Officer confirmed to the Committee that although SDNPA is classified as a Local Authority the risks highlighted in the 'Local Government Sector Update' parts of the report did not widely affect SDNPA due to factors such as the Authority did not rely on taxes for funding, did not have major commercial investments etc.

109. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- All the audit work was possible to be completed remotely and the accounts would not contain any unaudited balances.

110. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

1. Note the External Audit Progress Report and Sector Update

ITEM 13: QUARTER 1 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE REPORT

111. The Performance and Research Lead and the Project Management Lead introduced report PR20/21-16 and reminded Members of the report content.

112. The Chair informed the committee that Tableau was a good way for the Members to be able to see on demand and in real time the wide array and geographical spread of projects across the park.

113. The Committee commented that:

- Although funding for the Connecting Communities project was unsuccessful Members asked for the project to still be reported on as the concept is still sound and there may be other sources of funding.

114. In response to questions Officers clarified that:

- A smaller staff survey focusing on health and wellbeing was completed with staff over the summer period with results being collated and circulated to the Operational Management Team. A full staff survey would be conducted at a later date.
- Part of the CIL payment collected was automatically allocated to parish Councils within the SDNP.

115. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved to

1. Receive and note the Quarter 1 Corporate Performance and Project Performance report

ITEM 14: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

116. The Head of Governance introduced report PR20/21-17 and reminded members of the report contents.

117. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- Climate Change had not previously had its own risk within the Corporate Risk Register but was a key theme of the PMP which fell into the Risk 18: Projects - Internal

Management and Risk 21 Projects – External facing (Delivery and Reputation).

- Risk 1: Health and Safety covered staff mental health, further information would be added for subsequent committee reporting.
- The budget would be considered within the upcoming Member budget workshops on the 15th October 2020 and 17th December 2020 and the risk register may be amended when budget settlements were known.

118. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved to:

1. Note the Corporate Risk Register as at September 2020.

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 16.35

