



**South Downs**  
National Park Authority

**Agenda Item 8**  
**Report NPA20/21-15**

Report to	<b>South Downs National Park Authority</b>
Date	<b>17 December 2020</b>
By	<b>Authority Chair</b>
Title of Report <b>Note</b>	<b>Authority Chair Update</b>

**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 September.
- 1.2 It continues to be a busy time for the whole Authority, but equally an exciting one. There has been lots of progress made on a number of fronts, however as this year draws to a close and we enter the next, there is still more to come as we get to grips with the Agriculture Bill, the end of the Brexit transition period and other possible government announcements that may affect the whole protected landscape family.
- 1.3 I continue to be impressed by the focus and efforts of both our officer and member teams, and that work continues to deliver and drive improvement even against an ever changing background. The camaraderie and esprit de corps that I experience on a daily basis reassures me that we are in a good position to respond to the next wave of challenges, whatever they may be.

## **2. Parish Workshops**

- 2.1 As I write this update, we have just completed our second of three parish workshops. Due to Covid restrictions these have been held virtually. These have been very well received and attracted some new faces. This series of workshops centres around the Partnership Management Plan and how parishes can contribute to its delivery through their own projects and work, and have been ably chaired by our parish members. Staff and members have worked closely together to not only plan this series of workshops, but to determine how we can best communicate with our parishes in the future. These plans were brought to the P&R Committee and approved in September as part of a wider engagement paper. It has been agreed that we will now hold three parish meetings a year, with a more typical session with a Q&A followed by a webinar, followed by another session with a Q&A. This will provide a much better basis for shared learning with and between our parishes from across the National Park. The first session in Spring 2021 will therefore be a webinar. A plan will be drawn up early in the new year, setting out dates and details for all of the 2021 meetings.

### **3. South East Protected Landscapes (SEPL)**

- 3.1 In line with the recommendations of the Glover Review, the National Parks and AONBs in the SE (SEPL) have stepped up discussion around collaboration on shared objectives.
- 3.2 For example, in November a SEPL session was organised on the new Environmental Land Management Scheme and the scope for joint work and delivery of the scheme across the Protected Landscape family. Another session has been set up for early December to look at shared working around the development of a coherent Nature Recovery Network across the SE with the National Parks and AONBs as a core component. Our recently published People & Nature Network and GI Principles will be an important component of this discussion.
- 3.3 Nearer at hand we are nearing an agreement to help manage 5 heathland sites in partnership with EHDC. This complements our contract with Whitehill & Bordon Town Council to provide access and maintenance management for this coming year (2021/22). Talks are ongoing with the Surrey Hills AONB and others about creating a broader partnership to link into Surrey to benefit the heathlands there.
- 3.4 I have also held some very positive discussions with SDNPA officers and with external contacts about how we can develop the role of SEPL and grow this to create a Member level group to provide strategic input and direction across the family of protected landscapes in our region. There are many common issues and interests between us and I see opportunities in exploring these further together.

### **4. Alumni**

- 4.1 Members will recall a discussion at our last meeting about how we can continue to engage former members who are no longer on the Authority – through what was titled an “alumni scheme”. Although this was agreed by the authority, the lack of support for this scheme, evidenced by the number of members who abstained from the vote, has led me to reconsider the approach to this, and at this time there is no intention to move forward with establishing this group. I have discussed this topic with the Chairs and deputy chairs of our committees and we are in agreement that such a scheme, to be successful, needs more support than we sensed the NPA was willing to give and therefore we will continue to engage former members through our newsletters and informal relationships and networks. Once the dust has settled on our new partnership model, and the introduction of additional co-opted members on our P&R committee this may be a topic we revisit, and further views of members will be sought at that time.

### **5. Planning and Policy and Resources Committees Away Days**

- 5.1 Members of our two standing committees have taken opportunities to catch up with each other outside of the formal Committee structure and engage in informal discussions on topics of interest. In pre-Covid times, Members have been able to meet up with each other and with officers and converse informally before and after our formal committees and during lunch. These informal interactions are invaluable in enabling Members and officers to get to know each other better, receive updates, and raise questions or comments on a range of general topics. My sincere thanks to all those staff who prepared very helpful background briefing notes for these events. Depending on how long we remain reliant upon virtual Committee meetings, I see value in holding further such events.
- 5.2 Our Partnership Management Plan has been reviewed by an independent consultant and Members attended a presentation and considered some critical and helpful feedback that will inform our approach to future Plans and partnership working. This is referred to in more detail in the CEO’s Report to this meeting.

## **6. Climate change workshop**

- 6.1 Members met to discuss our emerging climate change activity, in a climate change workshop.
- 6.2 This workshop heard from a range of partners who delivered informative and thought-provoking presentations linking climate change adaptation and mitigation to local actions and initiatives. Topics included local authority interventions by Adur and Worthing, community group engagement through SECA, the role of farming in reducing emissions and the growth of community-based renewable energy projects by Community Energy South. The lively discussions that followed explored ways in which the SDNPA could embrace and apply some of these ideas through our own actions and contacts.
- 6.3 The P&R committee has since recommended our climate change commitments to the Authority for approval – and these are elsewhere on our agenda for this meeting.

## **7. Rampion Workshop**

- 7.1 Members also had the opportunity to attend a session to hear about proposals for Rampion 2 at an early stage of its development. Representatives from the Rampion 2 development team from RWE gave a presentation which sought to demonstrate how the project proposed to address the constraints and issues associated with this major offshore windfarm and the underground cable lines that are being planned to run on a new 15km route through the National Park. The proposals and some of their underlying assumptions and assurances were met with some critical questions and concerns. Authority Officers were given a clear direction to interrogate key aspects of the project's proposals and to negotiate robustly on the mitigation and net benefits that may be required.

## **8. Other external meetings**

- 8.1 **Transport for the South East Shadow Board:** I attended the TfSE meeting on 22 October, where it was confirmed that DfT was providing funding for the coming year and acknowledged the close working relationships between DfT and the 16 local Highway Authorities speaking with one voice, but did not support the statutory transfer of powers from government to TfSE at this stage. The Outer Orbital Study is now under way with 40 organisations contributing. DfT is due to produce its transport decarbonisation plan in late 2020.
- 8.2 **Meetings with MPs:** I have now had introductory meetings with Steve Brine (Winchester), Damian Hinds (East Hants), Tim Loughton (East Worthing & Shoreham), Andrew Griffith (Arundel) and Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton Kemp Town) with several more to see. Local MPs seem generally supportive of the National Park and the work of the Authority and appreciate that the Park has an important role to play in delivering ecosystem services, recreational opportunity and health and wellbeing to urban populations and in supporting a vibrant rural economy. I have taken the opportunity to promote our PANN Strategy to MPs and to seek support for the Park's interests when considering Government proposals relating to funding, Agriculture, Environment and the Glover Report. Local MPs have some particular interests in active transport initiatives providing access to and within the Park and the implications of the proposed planning reforms.
- 8.3 **Meetings with Local Authorities:** Since the end of October, I have met with Leaders of East Sussex CC, Lewes DC, Brighton and Hove CC and have several further Local Authority meetings planned. As above, I have taken the opportunity to promote our PANN Strategy and our draft Climate Change Action Plan with a view to seeking collaborative approaches on these key issues. My meeting with the Leader of Brighton and Hove City Council included our joint interest in the Brighton Estates WEP, which is currently undergoing a major public consultation. I have also had a separate and fruitful meeting with, the landscape architect advising the City on the exciting proposals for this project. We also discussed the desirability of promoting the National Park to Brighton

residents and visitors via a new town centre presence.

- 8.4 **NPUK:** A recent meeting with the Chairs of UK National Parks reviewed the impact of COVID-19 on protected landscapes. Several National Parks had suffered from the pressure of excessive visitor numbers, traffic and parking issues and anti-social behaviour. This was associated primarily with new urban-based visitors having little regard for or awareness of the countryside, its rural communities and its sensitivity to disturbance. One National Park has introduced Marshalls to supplement its Rangers and with authority to intervene and advise on poor behaviour, using temporarily unemployed door staff from closed pubs and clubs.
- 8.5 There was agreement that there was a serious need to increase information and guidance to a new and wider audience and to make more use of digital communications. My references to the SDNPA's successes of Virtual Festivals, Meet the Farmer and effective use of social media applications were applauded and may well result in similar approaches being adopted in other National Parks.
- 8.6 The meeting discussed approaches to Climate Change and establishing a presence at the global COP 26 conference in Glasgow next year. Loch Lomond and Trossachs NP extended an invitation to host an event relating to this.
- 8.7 **National Parks England:** We continue to work closely with other English National Parks in responding to the government's emerging positions on the Glover proposals, planning reforms, the Agriculture and Environment Bills and post COVID responses. Trevor's report refers to the newly published Delivery Plans from NPE.
- 8.8 **Defra:** I attended a virtual meeting on 27 October for Chairs of Defra's Arms Length Bodies (ALBs - e.g. NPs, AONBs, Forestry Commission, Natural England, Environment Agency). Defra officials provided some updates on the departmental priorities which included preparations for leaving the EU, animal disease, winter flood risks and impacts on resources, together with preparing for COP26 and dealing with the Agriculture and Environment Bills. There was a strong emphasis on Green Recovery for Nature, delivery of objectives, 'levelling up' and managing risk. The meeting included a session on increasing diversity in ALB Boards, especially for the BAME community and people with disabilities. I advised the meeting of the SDNPA's proposals to seek to address diversity through co-option of new Committee Members and the innovative use of digital communications.
- 8.9 **Coast to Capital LEP:** The regional economy has been hard hit by the pandemic, with young people (18-25) suffering disproportionately from unemployment and housing availability. There are hopes for a lift in the tourism economy based on reduced foreign travel and more 'staycations' and day visits and for growth in service provision in provincial and market towns as more people adapt to homeworking and reduce commuting to work in London.

## 9. Internal Meetings

- 9.1 Vanessa and I continue to meet regularly with the Chief Executive and senior staff, as well as with all the Committee Chairs and Deputies to provide guidance and direction to our emerging and ongoing work programmes. Although none of us members are able to make decisions outside of the formal committee processes, this close contact with the Senior team is invaluable to ensure that members voices are heard and that we are kept abreast of issues as they arise.
- 9.2 I have managed to have some useful meetings with some of our newly appointed Members and will try and catch up with others as soon as possible. I know that Vanessa has been very active in maintaining Member communications.
- 9.3 I am happy to respond to any questions that may arise from this overview and will provide any updates at the NPA meeting.

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

