

Report to	South Downs National Park Authority
Date	25 March 2021
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 December.

2. NPE – Glover update

- 2.1 I have had several meetings, both formal and informal, with other Chairs of National Parks England (NPE). At its AGM in January, there were reports of NPE's four shared delivery plans – on climate, landscapes for all, wildlife and sustainable farming - being well received by government and Natural England. Meanwhile, there have been ongoing expectations of a long awaited government response to the Glover Review, which was published in September 2019. There are current indications that a formal statement by the Secretary of State is imminent and that he will announce a National Landscape Service but there are no clear details either on timetable or content and little clarity on the principles or functions that a NLS would embrace.
- 2.2 In the light of this uncertainty, I have been working with a small Task and Finish Group to establish NPE's collective position, our aspirations for a national landscape service and a strategy to promote the views of National Park Authorities to government and potentially wider audiences. Trevor has also been closely involved and influential in this process. Both Chief Officers and Chairs of NPE have had a series of meetings with senior Defra officials which have sought to engage in constructive discussions on Glover's recommendations, funding proposals and the future of farming proposals, but there has been little or no contact with ministers.
- 2.3 I attended the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on National Parks' meeting in February which included some inspirational presentations on the key contribution that our parks make to people's health and wellbeing and how we are reaching a wider audience. I am pleased to say that our own Baroness Jones has been appointed Deputy Chair of the APPG, as has one of our local MPs, Damien Hinds. The next meeting of the APPG is intending to focus on the Glover review, and we hope that this will provide an opportunity for NPE's aspirations to be aired to interested MPs.

3. Creation of the new Partnership, particularly the process of appointing a Chair

- 3.1 Work is proceeding apace on the formation of the new South Downs Partnership, based on the Terms of Reference and the role profiles agreed by the NPA in December. A longlist

for the new independent chair has been drawn up and potential candidates are being contacted. Calls are being made and informal “interviews” will take place shortly with those who express an interest in the role. Meantime, a call for names for the fourteen roles on the new SDP has resulted in over 100 suggestions, with both familiar candidates and names who would bring in fresh perspectives and new audiences. I would like to thank all members that scoured their networks to suggest suitable individuals for these roles. The intention is to have the SDP up and running by the summer, and it will have a crucial role to play alongside the NPA in helping to broaden and deepen engagement with the delivery of the new PMP and to respond to the challenges of the Glover Review.

4. Volunteers & delivery

- 4.1 I am sure you will all join me in expressing our continued thanks to all the highly dedicated volunteers in our Volunteer Ranger Service. I attended the VRS AGM on the 12th March, and engaged in some very positive discussions on increasing both the diversity of the group and its scope of activities. I also enjoyed the privilege of delivering awards to many VRS members for their service and commitment, including several who have been contributing for ten or twenty years and one in particular who has been with the organisation for thirty years. Our volunteers are vital to the work the NPA delivers on the ground and they have continued to work in “pods” during this lock down, in line with a strict risk assessment, although I know they are keen to get back out in larger groups as soon as the rules allow it.

5. Co-optees

Elsewhere on our agenda you will note that the NPA will be asked to approve the appointments of a number of co-optees to the P&R committee – in line with the decisions previously taken by the Authority. This continues to be a major part of the Authority’s ongoing work in relation to improving the diversity in the range of voices we hear when considering issues and making our decisions and I am confident that the work of the Authority will be enhanced by these new co-optees, as it will be by the overall approach the Authority is taking to improving equity, diversity and inclusion.

6. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) Survey

- 6.1 The Authority has been continuing its work over recent months to ensure that our culture and community is inclusive for all and celebrates all diversity. Working with the Diversity Partnership, all staff and Members will have received a survey to assist in reviewing key areas of the SDNPA with regards to DEIB. The survey also looks at how the Authority could improve communication and understanding about DEIB between employees, partners, Members and volunteers, and help us to improve the retention, engagement and motivation of all our people and visitors. The survey and the focus groups that have already taken place will help to inform the recommendations from the Diversity Partnership and subsequently the Authority’s action plan.

7. Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (DGSPD)

- 7.1 A number of Members have been working with officers through a Task and Finish Group on the development of the DGSPD. This SPD is particularly significant as it provides clear guidance on the high standards of design quality that are expected for developments within the SDNP and reinforces the principle that being allowed to develop in a national park should be considered a privilege. It is particularly timely in that it reflects and reinforces much of the government’s currently emerging emphasis on design quality in new development. It is a substantial document that provides guidance for both small and large scale development and relates this to the context of the Park and its varied landscape characteristics. It covers a variety of topical areas, including the landscape-led approach to design, development in conservation areas, green infrastructure, social and environmental sustainability and dark night skies, to name but a few, and includes important advice for developers and their advisors. Officers are working with the Chair of Planning and myself on the final stages of preparing the document to go out to consultation within the next few months. The responses to this will be considered by the Planning Committee in due course.

8. Annual Member Discussions

- 8.1 As many of these meetings have taken place I would like to thank Members for their participation in the Annual Member Discussions and to Vanessa for taking on a significant share of this activity. These one to one meetings are an important way we reflect on the performance of the Authority over the past year, and better understand the challenges that Members have been, and indeed are, facing. They also help to provide a steer in the development of Member workshops and other events for the year ahead. They have been especially valuable in providing opportunities for personal discussions that have otherwise eluded us over this past year due to circumstances beyond all of our control.

9. Local Authority Meetings

- 9.1 I have continued our cycle of meetings with Local Authorities together with Vanessa and the Senior Officer team by meeting with West & East Sussex on 3rd Feb and Horsham DC on 23rd Feb. These meetings include the LA appointed member to the NPA and the senior team from the local authority and we use them as an opportunity to discuss key issues and current topics, as well as to review areas where we work closely together, or could improve our partnership working. Maintaining these important relationships are central to our partnership approach to delivery and I would like to extend my thanks to all members that have been involved for their continued support with these ongoing dialogues.

10. Other external meetings of note

- 10.1 I have met with several MPs since my last report, including Nick Gibb (Littlehampton and Bognor), Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) and Gillian Keegan (Chichester), all of whom expressed strong support for the Park and for the activities that the Authority and our staff undertake. I have also met with Winchester City Council to discuss our positions regarding Highways England's proposals on J9 of the M3, where many of our interests are aligned. I plan to have further discussions on this and on other matters of common interest with Hampshire County Council in the near future.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 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	N/A

