

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 25 FEBRUARY 2021

Held Online using the Zoom Cloud Meeting Software at 1.30pm

Present: Annie Brown, Tim Burr, Angus Dunn, Melanie Hunt, Doug Jones (Chair), Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Michael Lunn, Russell Oppenheimer, Martin Osborne, Henry Potter, Isabel Thurston and Stephen Whale.

Independent Members of the Committee: Tom Fourcade and Carole Nicholson

Ex-officio Members: Ian Phillips and Vanessa Rowlands

Other SDNPA Members: Barbara Holyome and William Meyer

SDNPA Officers: Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive Officer), Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Louise Read (Monitoring Officer), Nigel Manvell (Chief Finance Officer), Robin Parr (Head of Governance), Richard Sandiford (Senior Governance Officer) and Catherine Sydenham (Committee Officer).

Also Attended by: Anne Rehill (Performance and Project Manager), Tanya Hibberd (Performance and Research Lead), Liz Gent (Project Management Lead), Paul Fielding (Principal Auditor), Andy Conlan (External Auditor)

OPENING REMARKS

185. 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.

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

ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

187. There were no apologies for absence.

188. Martin Osborne joined the meeting.

ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

189. Doug Jones declared a Public Service interest in Item 10 as a Trustee of Petersfield Museum.

190. William Meyer declared a Public Service Interest in Item 11 as a Lewes District Councillor.

ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2020

191. The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 26 November 2020 were approved, subject to the following amendments, as a correct record and signed by the Chair:
- Minute 150 Bullet Point 1 amend wording to read '*Could there be opportunities Post Covid-19 for the introduction of de-stress programmes for some of the big hospitals for both patients and employees*'.

ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

192. The Director of Countryside Policy and Management updated the Committee on the following:
- Minute 134 which referred to the Sustainability Policy – with the update that the Sustainability Policy would be brought back when the Climate Change Action Plan was next considered by the Committee.
 - Minute 169 bullet 2 referred to the potential conflict of interest with Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) Officers providing advice for SDNPA investments - the Director informed the Committee that the External Auditors had been asked to look at the potential conflict of Interest as part of the Audit work.
193. The Committee commented that it was encouraging to know that their views on the level of organisation stress had been taken seriously and that the Committee Chairs and Senior Management Team (CC/SMT) had a standing item on their monthly agenda to discuss this and keep it under constant review. The Chief Executive reported that a staff well-being survey was in process. The results would be used to help balance staff stress as the process of lockdown ended and would be shared with the CC/SMT group.

ITEM 5: URGENT MATTERS

194. There were none

ITEM 6: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

195. There were no members of the public that had requested to speak.

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

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

ITEM 8: PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN DELIVERY – DRAFT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING STRATEGY

197. The Performance and Project Manager introduced report PR20/21-30, gave a presentation and reminded members of the report content. Within the presentation the Performance and Project Manager updated the Committee that an error on the map legend within the strategy had been amended to correctly label that the yellow circles were possible Health & Well-Being Priority Areas and the pink circles were designated Priority Areas with the red spots being potential Hubs.
198. Russell Oppenheimer joined the meeting.
199. The Committee commented that:
- The Health and Well-Being Strategy was excellent and it was impressed by the cross cutting of different work strands within the Authority.
 - There could be a potential role for National Parks England to engage sponsorship with large corporations to demonstrate their corporate responsibility.
 - How do we reach out to those people who social prescribing would benefit but don't

use the services of their GP and maybe not confident of using the SDNP?

200. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- The draft Health and Well-Being Strategy, as presented to Committee, had an indicative 10km buffer zone around the SDNP boundary for communities that the Strategy could reach out to. Officers took on board comments made by Members that communities in areas such as Crawley and South London had been using the National Park during Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and that there could be a positive impact on the Strategy not precluding SDNPA from working with communities outside of the 10km buffer zone where there could be direct Health and Well-Being benefits.
- The progression on how people engage with the National Park was contained within the Communications and Engagement Strategy but reference to the ladder of engagement could be added to the Health and Well-Being Strategy.
- The aim of the Health and Well-Being 'Hubs' was not to replace existing provision but to complement where there were gaps.
- A business case, detailing delivery and achievement, was being put together to ask the South Downs Trust to assist with project funding.
- Officers were keen to work with local landowners to provide opportunities for social prescribing.
- SDNPA was working closely with other organisations such as Sussex Local Nature Partnership to help deliver in partnership.
- There was a shift in direction to more social prescribing and it was hoped that this would be embedded within the Health Services' capacity to deliver.
- A local Environmental Land Management Scheme was being designed that included land owners providing access to the countryside.
- Officers liaise regularly with the New Forest National Park and were currently working jointly on how to work with Hampshire County Council together.
- Health and Well-Being was a notoriously difficult area to measure and work with Heritage Insider would begin later in the year to look at the impact measures. It was possible to show impact through case studies.
- Work was beginning in examining what the health sector would need to know and the language that SDNPA needed to use to communicate the benefits of social prescribing.

201. Annie Brown and William Meyer joined the meeting.

202. During the discussion the Committee suggested that the following changes be made to the draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy to further strengthen it before being recommended to the NPA for approval:

- Make reference to a broader group of people and not limit the work to the 10km buffer zone around the SDNPA boundary.
- Make reference to the ladder of engagement within the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

203. A revised recommendation was proposed and seconded. The Committee voted and the recommendation was carried.

204. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to delegate authority to the Director of Countryside Policy and Management, in consultation with the Chair of the P&R Committee, to amend the Draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy to reflect the views of the Committee and recommend the amended Draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy to the NPA for approval.

ITEM 9: DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2020-25 YEAR 2 ACTION PLAN FOR 2021/22

205. The Performance and Research Lead introduced report PR20/21-31, gave a presentation and reminded the Committee of the report content. Within the presentation the Performance and Research Lead explained to members that due to Covid-19 some of the work streams had been carried over into 2021/22 but there was also a large number of new pieces of work. Examples of significant new pieces of work were: Outcome 3 restoring nature at scale; Outcome 5 working alongside the Trust to develop and deliver a Nature Recovery Campaign; and Outcome 10 creating a Business Network, were given amongst others.
206. The Committee commented that:
- Officers need to be mindful of not only the resources of the staff but also that of the Impact on stakeholders and partners who are being consulted.
207. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The acronym 'SDEP' stood for 'South Downs Enterprise Partnership' and was similar to the Surrey Hills Enterprise Partnership model, and there would be a cumulative build to reach the 60-member target.
 - The Budget Workshop held in December was where members gave a steer into the resources that were allocated to each Theme Programme Board giving a direct link into the resource of the Corporate Plan priorities.
 - The Corporate Plan Year 2 Action Plan had been put together in close association with staff teams and each of the teams had agreed to the targets set. The Senior Management Team (SMT) were aware that it was a very ambitious plan that could stretch teams and acknowledged that there could be some slippage due to the implications of Covid-19.
 - SMT would not allow taking ownership of the seven Sisters Country Park to detract from other Authority work, it would be treated the same as any other large project.
 - There was an error within the 'other corporate priorities' section of the draft corporate plan year 2 action plan and it was the Wealden Heaths area team that relocation arrangement would begin for, not the Central Area as listed. The Central Area Team's new accommodation would be at Brinsbury College.
 - Quarter 1 performance report would be looked at closely to see whether the Authority had over committed what it was able to deliver.
208. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
- 1) Receive the draft Corporate Plan 2020-25 year 2 action plan for 2021/22
 - 2) Recommend approval of the Corporate Plan 2020-25 year 2 action plan to the National Park Authority.

ITEM 10: QUARTER 3 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE REPORT

209. The Performance and Research Lead and Project Management Lead introduced report PR20/21-32 and reminded members of the report content, making the following comments:
- There were 2 Corporate Plan objectives at the end of Quarter 3 that had a Red RAG Status: Develop an annual Challenge Fund with the reason being that alternative sources of funding were being explored; and Pilot the Green Infrastructure National Standards with the reason for the red RAG status being that a key member of staff on secondment had led to SDNPA withdrawal from the pilot scheme although lessons will be learnt from the pilot at a later date.
 - The majority of the Amber RAG Status within Project Performance were due to Covid-19 apart from Lullington Heath and Pump it Up which were due to contractual issues.
 - There were 50 projects in delivery, double the number at the same point last financial year which could bring some resourcing pressures.

210. The Project Management Officer updated the Committee on the Seven Sisters Country Park Project and reported that the finer details were being examined by the lawyers before exchange of contracts. The timeline was as follows:
- Completion likely to be 1st April 2021.
 - Construction phase would start around the 18th May 2021 and last approximately 30 weeks.
 - Phase 1 construction completed in January 2022.
 - Full operation would begin in January 2022.
211. The Project Management Officer updated the Committee that the timetable for the Seven Sisters Country Park to report to the NPA was as follows:
- March NPA – approval of the start-up capital for the Trading Company; Governance Matters relating to byelaws and delegated decision making including in relation to interim operating agreement; and Authority Budget and Capital Programme would contain some Seven Sisters Matters.
 - May NPA: Phase 2 feasibility costs for outline options to undertake design journey to planning. This would include a rough estimate of construction costs and scope for Phase 2.
 - October NPA: Agreement of the full operating agreement including landscape management plan and possibly the Phase 2 options and outline costs.
212. It was commented that the project was now at a very exciting stage but that the Authority did need to learn the lessons from the first phase in terms of recording the costs appropriately and having the necessary skills needed. The lessons learnt would allow the Authority to further grow and develop and in turn become more effective partners.
213. **RESOLVED:** The Committee Resolved to receive and note the Quarter 3 Corporate Performance and Project Performance report
214. Angus Dunn and Michael Lunn left the meeting.
215. The Committee adjourned for a 10-minute break

ITEM 11: CONTRACT FOR CONSTRUCTION OF EGRETS WAY PHASE 5

216. The Director of Countryside Policy and Management introduced report PR20/21-33 and reminded members of the report content.
217. The Committee commented that:
- The Egrets Way was a complex project involving many partners and provided a leisure route for off-road cycling between Lewes and Newhaven but there was still opportunity to further develop the C7 as a direct link between the 2 towns. Land through the Iford Estate was being provided by the local landowner for the part of the Egrets Way route that had not been constructed.
218. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- Total funding available for Phase 5 of the Egrets Way was £398,000 comprised of £250,000 from Lewes District Council Community Infrastructure Levy, £113,000 from the SDNPA Community Infrastructure Levy, and £35,000 from the SDNPA Strategic Fund. One strand of the work required a construction work contract in the region of £175,000 to £250,000 of which monies would be allocated from the total Phase 5 funds available. The remaining funds would be used for other elements of the work which did not require Committee approval for a procurement process.

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

- Approve the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor to undertake the construction of Egrets Way Phase 5.
- Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to award contracts for the above, following a competitive process as described in this report.

ITEM 12: BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2020/21: MONTH 9

220. The Chief Finance Officer introduced report PR20/21-34 and reminded members of the report content. Within the introduction the Chief Finance Officer pointed out that there was an error within Appendix 4 in that the graph had been repeated twice and the date within the last column of the table should read January to March 2020/21 and not January to March 2021/22. The Chief Finance Officer reminded members that the Authority Investment Strategy was to maintain security and liquidity, and therefore there were limitations on where investments could be deposited. In the previous financial year, the Treasury Management Strategy had been altered to include investment with short dated bonds, but the advisors were not currently recommending this due to the volatility within the market and the risk to capital this presents.

221. Members were also reminded that during the year £375,000 had been drawn from the Authority's reserves to deliver the Recovery Fund which had been extremely well received by partners.

222. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- That there were no new further changes to the Centurion Way route from that agreed by Planning Committee. The Structural and Bat Surveys were currently delayed due to Covid-19.
- There had been a recent increase in planning applications, which had been anticipated, and SDNPA was ready and prepared. There had been pressure within the enforcement team with a high increase in complaint correspondence relating to planning matters.
- The payment per planning application model with the Host Authority Service Level agreements had proved to be financially resilient under the Covid-19 crisis.

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

1. Note the 2020/21 revenue forecast position as at month 9 of a net (£233,000) below budget variance.
2. Note the 2020/21 capital forecast position as at month 9 of a zero budget variance and recommended that the National Park Authority approved the capital variation as set out in section 3.13 and Appendix 2.
3. Note the reserves position as at month 9.
4. Note the Treasury Management overview and position as at month 9.

ITEM 13: TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2021/22

224. The Chief Finance Officer introduced report PR20/21-35 and reminded Members of the report content. The Chief Finance Officer advised members that as revenue targets had been met, the Authority was not in a position of needing to take any unnecessary investment risks. Interest rates were currently very low and expected to remain low for some years, meaning that there was no immediate interest rate risk to the Authority should it choose to utilise its cash balances to finance the Seven Sisters Country Park project in the short term in lieu of borrowing.

225. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to recommend that the National Park Authority approved the Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22 as set out in Appendix I comprising of the:
- Treasury Management Policy Statement 2021/22;
 - Treasury Management Practices 2021/22;
 - Borrowing Strategy 2021/22;
 - Prudential and Treasury Indicators 2021/22 to 2023/24;
 - Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement; and
 - Annual Investment Strategy 2021/22, including the benchmark risk factor of 0.05%.

226. Martin Osborne left the meeting.

ITEM 14: INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

227. The Principal Auditor introduced report PR20/21-36 and reminded members of the report content.
228. The Committee commented that:
- As part of the Procurement and Contract Managements actions identified in appendix 3 it should also be considered how the procurement process could be further developed to include equality, diversity and inclusion criteria to demonstrate the values SDNPA want to promote and work with.
 - Thanks went to the Governance team and Accounting teams for their involvement in achieving the substantial assurance audits.
229. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The Authority currently had 7 apprentices, which was a high percentage for a small organisation. The Authority had put in an application for 2-3 trainees as part of the kick-start programme and was keen that this added to the young person's career development and not a way just to occupy their time.
230. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note:
- Progress against the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan (2020/21).
 - The implementation of audit actions previously agreed by management

ITEM 15: EXTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2019/20

231. The External Auditor introduced report PR20/21-37 and reminded members of the report content.
232. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The fee level increase was comparable to other audit increases across the sector and manageable from within the allocated budgets.
233. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to consider the Annual Audit Letter 2019/20.

ITEM 16: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

234. The Head of Governance introduced report PR20/21-38 and reminded members of the report content. Within the introduction the Head of Governance informed the Committee that the Countryside and Policy Directorate had recently reviewed their directorate risk register and any changes felt necessary to the register would be reflected within the next Corporate Risk Register reported to Committee.

235. The Committee commented that:

- It was pleased to see that the risk register was a fair and honest assessment of the current situation, reflected Members' viewpoints and summed up early warning signals.

236. **RESOLVED** The Committee resolved to note the Corporate Risk Register as at February 2021.

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 16:38