

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 I 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 1 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

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 29 APRIL 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 and Isabel Thurston.

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

Co-opted Members: Morris Findley and Lawrence Leather.

Other SDNPA Members: Chris Dowling, William Meyer, Ian Phillips and Vanessa Rowlands.

SDNPA Officers: Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive Officer), Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Louise Read (Monitoring Officer), Nigel Manvell (Chief Finance Officer), Alan Brough (Head of Business Services), Mark Winton (Internal Auditor), Andy Conlan (Grant Thornton – External Auditor) Robin Parr (Head of Governance), Richard Sandiford (Senior Governance Officer) and Catherine Sydenham (Committee Officer).

Also Attended by: Nick Heasman (Countryside and Policy Manager – Central Downs), Mark Alden (Enterprise Development Strategic Lead), Katherine Beer (Sustainable Tourism Lead), Claire Kerr (Countryside and Policy Manager – Eastern Downs), Chris Fairbrother (Landscape and Biodiversity Lead – Chalk), Jeremy Burgess (Landscape and Biodiversity Lead – Water).

OPENING REMARKS

237. The Chair opened the meeting

238. The Chair welcomed all those present and stated that:

- 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.

239. The Chair extended a warm welcome to Co-opted Members Morris Findley and Lawrence Leather.

240. The Chair advised the Committee that, using his discretion as Chair, the business of the agenda would be re-ordered with Item 15 taken ahead of Item 12 for the reason being that there had been more changes than usual to the corporate risk register.

ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

241. Apologies were received from Stephen Whale.

ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

242. Annie Brown declared a disclosable prejudicial pecuniary interest in Items 10 and 11 as a Land Manager at Truleigh Hill and withdrew from the meeting for these items.

ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 25 FEBRUARY 2021

243. The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 25 February 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair

ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

244. There were no matters arising.

ITEM 5: URGENT MATTERS

245. There were no urgent matters for discussion.

ITEM 6: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

246. There were no members of the public who had requested to speak.

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

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

ITEM 8: CO-OPTEE INTRODUCTION

248. The Chair reminded the Committee that the reasons for appointing the new Co-opted Members included help to improve diversity in the range of voices that are heard at committee meetings, adding to the existing breadth of experience and expertise, so as to inform and challenge from different perspectives as well as advocating and championing the National Park and helping to reach audiences that are currently relatively difficult to connect with. The Co-opted Members Morris Findley and Lawrence Leather then individually introduced themselves.

ITEM 9: PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN DELIVERY – RURAL ECONOMY & INTRODUCTION TO THE SOUTH DOWNS ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP

249. The Countryside and Policy Manager (Central Downs) introduced report PR20/21-39 and reminded Members of the background. The Countryside and Policy Manager (Central Downs) and Authority Member Chris Dowling gave a presentation on the South Downs Enterprise Partnership (SDEP).

250. The Committee commented that:

- Was the target for the number of businesses to sign up to South Downs Enterprise Partnership (SDEP) ambitious enough as the 5 year target only represented 4.5% of the sector?
- Was it possible that the businesses model could be re-examined to explore options that through the creation of Membership fees the staff costs associated with the SDEP could be covered?
- The SDEP pledge criteria should include a mechanism to ensure that businesses were being inclusive and diverse.

251. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- Membership will be initially free of charge and there would be promotion to businesses to encourage them to sign up. The issue of charging would be kept under review.
- The pledge had not yet been written but would be developed for the launch in December.
- There would be distinction between the SDEP and the Sussex Modern Enterprise Partnership, which had been developed in 2020, which targeted a distinct audience of high spend visitors. The unique selling point for the SDEP would be around sustainability and social responsibility enabling businesses to meet the challenge of Climate Change.
- Officers had been working with local businesses and an example was given of an ice-cream business that through its production produced a large amount of carbon and which it had been able to offset through working with the South Downs National Park Trust and investing in the National Park.
- The SDEP will play an important role in how businesses can contribute to the Net Zero with Nature Targets which would be achieved by using existing standards and through either writing these standards into the pledge or through the creation of sustainability certification.

- Viticulture was a strongly emerging sector with a 90% increase in vineyards in the SDNP since 2016 due to climate change inducing the current trend of temperature increase and the suitability of soils. Officers referred to the '*Viticulture Growth Impact Assessment*' a copy of which would be circulated to the Committee.
- The SDEP business model had been put together with the initial thoughts of charging for membership and the targets now needed to be revised to take into account that there would be no membership charges for the initial period.
- Within the '*One to Many*' model that been used for engagement with the local economic and social enterprise partners, '*One*' represents the SDNPA Thrive Team and the '*Many*' represents the local economic partnerships.
- An error within the report was corrected that the Brighton Downland Whole Estate Plan should read that it would be '*ready for endorsement in Spring 2022*' not Spring 2020.

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

1. Receive and note the performance update measured against Partnership Management Plan Delivery on the Rural Economy.
2. Endorse the approach to the South Downs Enterprise Partnership set out at section 6 and 7 of the report
3. Endorse the 10 year vision for the South Downs National Park (SDNP) Rural Economy as set out in Appendix I of the report.

ITEM 10: CHANGING CHALK PROJECT UPDATE

253. Annie Brown withdrew from the meeting.
254. The Chair informed the Committee that using his discretion as Chair, for Item 10, a more informal debating style than that laid out in Appendix 5 of the Standing Orders would be adopted. In particular, the Chair advised he would allow a presentation and questions to be answered from Sam Page of the National Trust.
255. The Countryside and Policy Manager (Eastern Downs) and Sam Page of the National Trust gave a presentation to remind members of the report content and to set the project scene. The Landscape and Biodiversity Officer (Chalk) and The Landscape and Biodiversity (Water) answered questions.
256. The Committee commented that:
- The cross cutting information contained within the report on cross collaboration of the Changing Chalk project with other partners and stakeholders was particularly useful for Members.
257. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The Conservation Grazing project seeks to work with farmers and landowners to develop a non-intensive conservation grazing system to restore lowland chalk grassland. The project also seeks to connect the surrounding Towns with the South Downs and to raise awareness of Chalk Grassland and why it was so unique and special. Successes from the Heathlands Reunited project were being learnt with work such as the '*Dog Ambassador*' scheme being embedded in the Changing Chalk project. Rangers would be used on the ground to educate and encourage responsible visitor behaviour.
 - The '*Reconnecting Dew Pond*' project would work at 2 levels with the first being to fill the gaps where there were no dew ponds in place to help with the connectivity of species and the second level would be the crossover to habitats and to target specific species.
 - There were a total of 18 projects within the 'Changing Chalk' project and the SDNPA was only leading on 2 of these, '*Reconnecting Dew Ponds*' and '*Conservation Grazing*'. Both of these projects had limited outreach but where possible both would engage volunteers and local communities. Working with schools was not a specific target audience for the SDNPA led projects but was for many of the other 16 individual

projects. There would be several target audiences for the all the projects with all the projects interlinking. More information on the other 16 projects would be circulated to the Committee.

- The South Downs Partnership would also be involved in reviewing the progress of the project against the outcomes within Partnership Management Plan. Michael Lunn left the meeting

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

- I. Note the update on the Changing Chalk Project.

259. Annie Brown returned to the meeting.

260. The Committee adjourned for a 10 minute break.

ITEM 11: TRULEIGH HILL LANDSCAPE PROJECT – END OF PROJECT REVIEW

261. Annie Brown addressed the Committee for 3 minutes giving her reflections on the project as a Land Manager at Truleigh Hill and then withdrew from the meeting.

262. The Landscape and Biodiversity Lead (Chalk) introduced report PR20/21/-41 and reminded members of the report content.

263. The Committee commented that:

- It thanked the officers for the open and honest end of project review. Not all projects can be successful, organisations had to be prepared to fail sometimes and be able to learn from the mistakes that were made. The project cost £90,000 and did not deliver landscape change. The project did deliver outreach work and there was discussion that outreach work should be business as usual work.
- Outreach work was critical to a project's success but SDNPA should be the 'glue' and not always the 'do'. Training should be available to staff to ensure that they had the necessary outreach skills to deliver the outreach work.
- A good diverse range of community organisations had been involved in the project and this was a good example of something that should be transferable to other projects across the park.
- It praised the plans for new hedgerow creation as a good way of engaging people.

264. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- There were only modest improvements in the landscape changes such as hedgerow planting and placement of wild seed mixes with many other aspirations that were not delivered. The landscape aspirations did still exist and some of the works would continue within the project legacy as the site did still have a lot of potential. Elements from the Action Plan and Landscape Plan would continue through a dedicated Ranger for Truleigh Hill in the Area Team.
- Legacy outreach work was also happening through the Health and Wellbeing Strategy with Truleigh Hill identified as a Health and Wellbeing hub and also through the 'Generation Green' project which had been funded through the Green Recovery Fund.
- The £90,000.00 project cost did include the Project Officer cost and was not the cost for the project work alone.
- The project did achieve better co-ordination with the Rural Crime Officer, Wildlife Heritage Officer and Youth Intervention team. Officers acknowledged that although engagement work was undertaken with a wide range of audiences it does take time to build strong relationships and acknowledgement was made of the fact that perhaps too much was expected from the project.
- The Truleigh Hill Youth Hostel Association (YHA) expansion plans were delayed in 2020 due to the YHA board not approving the expansion plans, but there was still intention to proceed with the plans later. Since the initial Truleigh Hill refurbishment

plans had been discussed, the YHA had changed its direction and was planning to focus on a number of strategic hub hostels, franchising out smaller hostels and creating a network of non YHA hostels. SDNPA Officers were meeting with Senior YHA staff to discuss whether the Camping Barn at the Seven Sisters could become part of the network of Non-YHA hostels.

- Lessons learnt from the Project were currently being and would continue to be applied to other projects.
265. The Chair thanked Officers for producing an honest report with clear reflections on the projects successes and where lessons could be learnt for future.
266. Angus Dunn left the meeting.
267. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
- I. Receive and consider the end-of project evaluation report for the Truleigh Hill landscape project.
268. Annie Brown returned to the meeting.

ITEM 15: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

269. The Head of Governance introduced report PR20/21-45 and reminded members of the report content.
270. The Committee commented that:
- Could consideration be given to Risk 17, '*Legislative Impact post Brexit*' as to whether the scoring reflected an accurate impact and probability assessment? There were wide ranging views with some members expressing views that as the Government had stated that there could be a higher degree of Environmental Protection post Brexit that the probability of the risk to SDNPA could be lowered with other Members expressing views that there was still uncertainty and the risk was accurately scored.
 - Could consideration be given to Risk 23 '*Seven Sisters Country Park*' as to whether the scoring reflected the risks associated with the new area of work as the mitigations in place were not yet tested?
 - It noted the 2 risks: Risk 2 '*Finance and Budgets*' and new Risk 25 '*Government Response to Landscape Review*' were both scored red and the level of uncertainty that this placed on the SDNPA.
271. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The scoring of Risk 17 '*Legislative Impact post Brexit*' was probably accurately placed and agreed to reassess Risk 23 '*Seven Sisters Country Park*' and informed the Committee that the intention of the SMT was that resources would not be diverted away from other projects to the Seven Sisters.
 - Risk 2 '*Finance and Budgets*' was a serious concern with the second year of a flat cash settlement from Defra. The prospect of a flat cash settlement for a third year would be discussed at a future member workshop.
 - Risk 25 '*Government Response to Landscape Review*' would be discussed in more depth at a future Member workshop.

272. Angus Dunn returned to the meeting
273. **RESOLVED** The Committee resolved to

- I. Note the Corporate Risk Register as at April 2021.

ITEM 12: INTERNAL AUDIT – STRATEGY & ANNUAL AUDIT PLAN

274. The Internal Auditor introduced report PR20/21-42 and reminded members of the report

content and advised the Committee that the Internal Auditors would be auditing the Seven Sisters Country Park from the point of view of the Authority and not that of the Trading Company, which would need separate audit work.

275. The Committee commented that:

- It was surprised to hear that the auditors would not be looking at the Trading Company because it was important which balance sheet costs were assigned too as well as which costs were capital assets. Now was the time to get processes in place and Members needed to be reassured that there was consistency across both the Authority and the Trading Company.

276. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- Members were reminded that the Independent Members, Chair and Deputy Chairs were sent the full audit reports.
- Advice and guidance was being sought on the boundaries of what internal audit was able to do in terms of auditing the Seven Sisters Country Park project. Some of the risks to the Authority will include risks to the company by association.
- Until the Trading Company was formed the responsibility for the revenue expenditure of Seven Sisters Project would be with the Head of Business Services and the Capital expenditure with the Seven Sisters Country Park Project Manager. The Seven Sisters Project Board also received a monthly budget report.

277. An Amendment to Recommendation 2 was proposed and seconded to add the following words ‘*in consultation with the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee*’, so that it read ‘*Delegate authority to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee to amend the Annual Audit Plan 2021/22 as he consider appropriate to support the Authority through the Covid -19 pandemic recovery phase*’.

278. The amendment was agreed.

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

1. Approve the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan for 2021/22.
2. Delegate authority to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee to amend the Annual Audit Plan 2021/22 as he considers appropriate to support the Authority through the Covid 19 pandemic recovery phase.
3. Note that any amendments made to the Annual Audit Plan will be reported to the Committee at the appropriate time.

ITEM 13: INTERNAL AUDIT - PROGRESS REPORT

280. The Internal Auditor introduced report PR20/21-43 and reminded members of the report content.

281. The Committee commented that:

- It would be helpful for the list of agreed actions table to identify the audit report that was referred to, so that Members could request the full report if they wished to do so.

282. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- Procedures were in place to avoid purchase orders being signed retrospectively but it was not always possible to do so in instances such as legal costs or utility bills when the exact amount was unknown.
- The List of agreed actions that had not yet been implemented was correct at the time of the report being written and all actions should be able to be traced through from actions not yet due to overdue for implementation (if needed) to actions implemented.

283. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note:
1. Progress against the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan (2020/21).
 2. The implementation of audit actions previously agreed by management.

ITEM 14: EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2020/21

284. The External Auditor introduced report PR20/21-44 and reminded the Committee of the report content.
285. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- Both Internal and External Auditors would be auditing and providing their views on the potential conflict of interest with Brighton and Hove City Council Officers providing advice for SDNPA investments.
 - Committee Members were not expected to review the models used to make the accounting estimates. More information on the processes and models used would be contained within the future cover report to the accounts.
286. It was proposed and seconded to amend the recommendation to change the word ‘consider’ to ‘agree’, so that it read ‘Agree the *External Audit Plan*’.
287. The amendment was agreed.
288. **RESOLVED: The Committee resolved to:**
1. Agree the External Audit Plan 2020/21
289. The Chair informed the Committee that he was anticipating that due to personal reasons this would be his last meeting as Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee as he would not be putting himself forward for re-appointment at the NPA meeting in July. He thanked all Members and Staff for all their contributions during his time as Chair.
290. The Committee expressed their thanks and praise to the Chair.

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 5.11pm

