

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Committee

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.

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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

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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

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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.

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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 £90,00.00 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?

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- 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.

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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

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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