



South Downs
National Park Authority

Agenda Item 8
Report NPA21/22-06

Report to	South Downs National Park Authority
Date	21 October 2021
By	Authority Chair
Title of Report	Authority Chair Update
Note	

Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to note the update from the Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report is an update on my activities and events since the last NPA meeting on 6 July.

2. The New Normal?

2.1 Over the past three months, we have gradually been adjusting to tentative post Covid working arrangements, and I have really enjoyed the opportunities to meet up in person with Members, staff and partners. It is right, however, that we are moving with some caution as there remain too many uncertainties to return to pre-Covid lifestyles. I also believe that it is right that we are adopting some of the practices that we have been applying over the past eighteen months and that we recognise the benefits that these bring.

2.2 By making efficient use of technology, many of our informal and working meetings can and will be held virtually whilst saving on the time, costs, energy and carbon counts associated with travelling. I do, however, look forward to meeting up with Members in person at formal meetings, site visits and events where personal interaction is helpful.

2.3 Flexible working arrangements, which the Authority has always viewed positively, appear to be enabling a good work life balance whilst emphasising performance and delivery, rather than simple attendance. I would like to take this opportunity to thank staff and Members for their efforts and perseverance in maintaining the Authority's direction and services over these past three months and more.

3. South Downs Partnership

3.1 As noted in the CEO's Report, the South Downs Partnership had its first meeting in July and I have been liaising with Clare Moriarty as Chair and Andrew Lee. We have now completed making appointments to all the representative sectors and we can look forward to the Partnership Group providing some effective connections between the Authority and external actors. Members of the Partnership have already had meetings with key officers on areas of interest.

4. Nature Recovery

- 4.1 Our Nature Recovery Campaign, which was launched in July, is on the Partnership's Agenda with a call for identifying suitable sites for nature recovery. As you will be aware, the Nature Recovery Campaign is attracting considerable interest and the very charming video has reached a huge audience. Members will have seen the South Downs Nature Recovery Bulletin #2 circulated in October with a useful digest of updates and news. Our Nature Recovery Campaign website¹ is now live and provides a dedicated public gateway and a wealth of useful resources to inform and guide renaturing projects.

5. National Issues, National Parks England and Defra

- 5.1 I have been spending some considerable time working with National Parks England, in my capacity as Deputy Chair, predominantly dealing with the many uncertainties associated with the long anticipated government response to the Glover Review. Trevor refers in his report to his close liaison with Defra officials – which I believe has been very fruitful. I share his concerns that there appears to be insufficient attention to many of Glover's practical proposals to deliver Defra's 25 year plan and to the work of National Park Authorities, notably our own, in responding to these.
- 5.2 It now appears that the proposed government consultation document is unlikely to be published before November. Together with the Chairs of NPE and the NAAONB, I have a meeting planned with Lord Benyon on 3 November, which I hope will include a preview of the government's document and opportunity to discuss its content. This will follow on from a meeting that I am attending on 27 October in the Peak District with the Chairs of NPE, NAAONB and Natural England. This will be addressing the potential fruits of the tripartite agreement between these respective bodies and seeking more information about NE's significant promotion of its landscape interests alongside those of nature and biodiversity.
- 5.3 Within NPE, I have been working with a Task and Finish Group to seek a collective view on government proposals for a National Landscape Service, which now appear less imminent, and on NPA governance issues, which remain high on the ministerial agenda. The differing views on these matters from different National Parks illustrate that a 'one size fits all' approach does not appear well suited to the diverse characteristics of all ten Parks, where local representation and connections are seen as key to delivery.
- 5.4 I attended an Arm's Length Body meeting with Defra which, following an overview of Departmental priorities, addressed issues relating to COP26, governance, accountability and conflicts of interest. There was an emphasis on the use of digital technology and cross-departmental working in facing challenges including net zero with nature, climate change and food security and delivering post EU opportunities for regulatory reform.

6. Visits and events

- 6.1 I visited the Seven Sisters Country Park over the Bank Holiday, following completion of our acquisition, and was really impressed by the number and diversity of visitors and the engagement and enthusiasm of all of our staff. We have embarked on a transformation of this iconic site and all the indications are looking good for the future.
- 6.2 I attended the Sussex Heritage Design Awards in September and was very proud to award our own South Downs Design Award for exemplary design within the Park to new housing at Belloc Close, Midhurst and Highly Commended awards to a house at Landour, Telscombe and The Goodwood Education Centre, on the Goodwood Estate. It was heartening to see such high standards of design in new development generally and we can only hope that these standards can be reflected in other new schemes and, in particular, larger scale commercial and housing developments.
- 6.3 I also attended the opening of the redesigned Gilbert White Museum. This remains one of the treasures of the Park and a salutary reminder of the significance of this 18th c. rural parson's observations and records and their relevance not only to the Park and its interests

¹ <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/nature-recovery-information-for-delivery-partners/>

but to global ecological concerns. The revised curation of the displays within the setting of the house and grounds make a rewarding visitor experience.

- 6.4 I attended a meeting of the Forest Champions Group at the Forestry Commission's Forest Research Centre at Alice Holt, and was introduced to the Climate Change Adaptation Trail². This is a very accessible, family-friendly trail which highlights the implications of climate change on forestry and woodlands. It shares some of its route with the Shipwrights Way.
- 6.5 I have been invited to the re-opening of Petersfield Museum, also to the Annual Judges Service for the Shrieval Year at Chichester Cathedral, both events to which I look forward to attending at the time of writing this report.

7. Other Meetings / Activities

- 7.1 Together with members of the Task and Finish Group (TFG), I visited Shoreham Cement Works, a strategic site in our Local Plan, and was struck by the scale of the site, which is not apparent from the nearby road, and by the potential for a truly exemplary development project. This has been followed up by a Design Review Panel Workshop and a meeting of the TFG to progress the Authority's proposed Area Action Plan.
- 7.2 I represent protected landscapes on the Transport for the South East (TfSE) Shadow Board and I have had several meetings in connection with this. These include a workshop to review TfSE's future roles and responsibilities, facilitated by Arup in London; a one to one meeting with the Chair, Keith Glazier, to discuss areas of common interest; a stakeholder workshop meeting with consultants to discuss issues relating to the A259 road; and a meeting of the Partnership Board held in person in Hove.
- 7.3 I have received several communications expressing concerns regarding the problems relating to motorised vehicle use of Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs) in Hampshire and I am currently planning a meeting with relevant Hampshire County Council Members to discuss this issue and potential interventions in detail.
- 7.4 I have attended several presentations as part of the Landscape Institute's (virtual) conference on Planning Reform and a workshop from the Design Council on promoting cross-sectoral climate sensitive design. I have also accepted an invitation to be a Member of the Panel to review BS5837 which sets industry standards for trees in relation to development and construction.
- 7.5 And, in the absence of foreign travel opportunities, I have enjoyed visits to Bletchley Park, Stowe's remarkable landscape grounds, Ironbridge, and the Mendip Hills AONB amongst other 'staycation' outings.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 This report sets out an update on and overview of my activities since the previous NPA meeting and I leave it to Members to refer to any issues or questions that they may wish to raise at the meeting.

IAN PHILLIPS
Authority Chair
South Downs National Park Authority

Contact Officer: Governance Officer
Tel: 01730 814810
email: Committee.officer@southdowns.gov.uk

² https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/documents/7117/18_0002_Leaflet_AH_self_guide_walk_Final.pdf

