



The Future of Farming in the South Downs National Park Farmers' Workshops

Summary Report for

South Downs National Park Authority

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Contents

1	Executive Summary	4
2	Introduction.....	6
3	Priorities and principles for a future scheme.....	8
4	Delivery and practicalities – lessons learned to date	10
5	Shaping a future scheme.....	13
6	Developing a pilot scheme	15
	Annex – Workshop Participants.....	17

- 1.1 This report summarises the results of three Farmers' Workshops held over the period April-June 2017 with the working title 'Your chance to influence the Future of Farming the South Downs National Park'. The main aims of the workshops were to start building an evidence base to shape a future agricultural / agri-environment scheme in the South Downs and to discuss how it could be market tested.
- 1.2 The three workshops were generally regarded by participants as **positive events** *"Useful meeting, good session. Needs a follow-up session."* There was good farmer engagement throughout each workshop, in all three venues.
- 1.3 A wide range of **issues** were covered. A 'Word Cloud', highlighting the topics raised most frequently during the workshops, is set out in Figure 1-1.

- # The Future of Farming in the South Downs National Park
- ## Farmers' Workshops - Summary Report

- 1.5 Key **priorities and principles** for a future scheme included: the need to cover both farming and environmental priorities; the need to tailor the scheme to reflect different priorities in different areas; the requirement for better communications with the public; the need to maintain farm business profitability now and in the future; and positively incentivising the delivery of ecosystem services.
- 1.6 Key lessons learned to date in terms of **delivery and practicalities** included: options which work well are those which fit the farming system; good local advisers are essential; the importance of being clear on objectives; the need to be flexible and not prescriptive; the vital role of mixed and livestock farming; the need to support the management of access and visitors; and a desire for better, more realistic payments for agri-environmental management and work.
- 1.7 Participants felt that a **future scheme** should, amongst other things: be positive, attractive to the public and meaningful to farmers; value and respect farmers and farming; be clear on environmental benefits; be flexible and bespoke at local level; be simple and accessible; involve training and advice for farmers; include education and communication to society; and continue to provide some basic farm support.
- 1.8 In terms of developing a **pilot scheme** to market test ideas, new approaches etc., key points made included: build on the South Downs Unique Selling Points (USPs); work alongside, or on top, of existing schemes; operate at a cluster scale, and develop that model to cover design, delivery, funding and monitoring; support profitable farming; address specific local environmental and other priorities; be outcome-based; promote a co-operative/collaborative model; and have a wrap-around programme of activities covering communication, education, demonstrating value, and research and development.
- 1.9 In summary, the three workshops provided a valuable contribution to the task of developing a new agricultural policy and schemes, both nationally and at local level. The dialogue to date represents a start to that process; and further discussions will be needed to refine views and proposals. Next steps going forward will include: developing a pilot scheme proposal in partnership with others, plus a bid for funding; and, in due course, making representations on behalf of the South Downs National Park as a whole to Defra in terms of future policy and schemes.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This report summarises the findings from three Farmers' Workshops held in the South Downs during the period April-June 2017. The title for the workshops was "Your chance to influence the Future of Farming in the South Downs National Park".
- 2.2 The aims of the workshops were to:
- Start building an evidence base to shape a future scheme in the South Downs
 - Identify potential priorities and principles for a new scheme
 - Consider delivery and practicalities, drawing on lessons learned to date
 - Discuss what a new scheme might look like and how it might be market tested
 - Agree next steps
- 2.3 The context for the workshops included the following:
- The UK's vote to leave the EU with effect from 2019 ('Brexit') and the need to develop a new agricultural policy and schemes in the UK/England post-Brexit.
 - The Government's proposed legislation (set out in the recent Queen's Speech) to enable it to make agricultural support payments once the UK leaves the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and its guarantee to maintain the existing level of payments until 2022.
 - The appointment of Michael Gove as the new Secretary of State at the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), his statements on the importance of protecting the environment and raising standards, and his commitment to publishing an ambitious 25 year Environment Plan.
 - The need to justify future spend on agriculture and deliver better value for money, and the increasing emphasis being put on "public money for public goods" and the provision of natural capital and ecosystem services.
 - The importance of farming in National Parks, including the South Downs, and the adverse impacts on businesses, rural communities and the rural environment of a potential reduction in public investment.
 - National Park England's representations to Defra on the fundamental importance of sustainable agriculture to protected landscapes and its offer to Government for National Park Authorities to pilot new approaches and build on existing experiences of farmer-led schemes in National Parks.
 - South Downs National Park Authority's desire to work with farmers to identify future priorities for farming in the South Downs and explore the opportunities for piloting options for a new scheme.

2.4 The details of the three workshops are set out in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1: Workshop details

Date	Venue	Farmers' Group / Cluster
28 April 2017	Sullington, West Sussex	Arun to Adur
31 May 2017	Meonstoke, Hampshire	Selborne Landscape Partnership & Winchester Downs
20 June 2017	Plumpton College, East Sussex	Eastern Downs

- 2.5 62 participants (including 46 farmers and farm advisers) took part in the three workshops. Participants included farmers, landowners, advisers and representatives from partner organisations, as well as South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) staff. A list of participants is set out in the Annex.
- 2.6 An independent facilitator - Paul Silcock, Cumulus Consultants – was engaged to plan and facilitate the workshops and produce this summary report, based on notes taken during the workshops.
- 2.7 The report is structured around the three sessions held during the workshops - which focus on a future, permanent scheme – plus implications for a potential pilot scheme to test new ideas/ways of working over the next 2-3 years. The key points made by the participants during each session/discussion are captured.
- 2.8 It is important to note that the views expressed in this report do not represent SDNPA's policy or position. The workshops and report will however provide a good basis for future dialogue between SDNPA, farmers, landowners and other partners.

3 Priorities and principles for a future scheme

- 3.1 The first session in each workshop – involving smaller break-out groups - aimed to capture views on priorities and principles for a future scheme in the South Downs. The scope of this scheme was taken to include those areas covered by both Pillars I and II of the current regime (i.e. Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), Agri-Environment Schemes (AES) and other elements of the Rural Development Programme (RDP)).
- 3.2 Key points made (plus caveats, suggestions and quotes) in respect of priorities to be delivered or enhanced by a new scheme are set out in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1: Priorities for a future scheme – key points

- Both farming and environmental priorities...
- Mixed farming and livestock farming – *“mixed farming is key” “don’t take livestock farming for granted”*
- Family farming – understanding, commitment, continuity/next generation
- Resilience – need the farmers on the land
- Maintenance and management, as well as creation – *“farming is 90% habitat management and maintenance and 10% creation”*
- Different priorities in different local areas:
 - Clean water (e.g. tackling nitrate leaching)
 - Clean air
 - Soils / carbon (e.g. via minimum tillage)
 - Habitat conservation (e.g. hay meadows, biodiverse grassland)
 - Habitat/site connectivity
 - Access and visitor management
 - Education
 - Landscape and heritage
 - Woodland
- Needs to be tailor-made to the landscape
- Local food production and consumption – previous attempts to localise markets have not worked; could look again to find out why. Could build on ‘farm to fork’ / ‘grow local, eat local’ campaigns
- Provenance scheme – easily recognisable logo; could look at examples of what has worked well before/elsewhere (e.g. Scottish beef)
- Energy production
- Diversification – better linkage between planning and public good delivery
- Health and well-being benefits
- Communication, education and demonstration – *“explain what we are doing better / communicate to the public in particular”*

3.3 The principles which should underpin a new scheme, as suggested by participants, are summarised in Table 3-2.

Table 3-2: Principles underpinning a future scheme – key points

- Clear objectives and outcomes
- Simple, accessible, flexible and responsive
- Bold, visible, achievable and deliverable
- Bespoke approach created collaboratively/locally
- Promotes profitable farming businesses – *“low food prices mean still a need for basic support”*
- Recognises the need for viable farms to support environment and wildlife agriculture – *“core farming activity is vulnerable to a decline in support (and changes in tariffs/trading arrangements)”*
- Recognises that the landscape is already functioning – *“needs a light touch”* *“people like to see working farms/landscapes”*
- Acknowledges big investment already made by farmers and landowners – *“need to look at what farmers deliver now to identify what support is needed to continue this”*
- Payments which are sufficient and on time
- Incentivises and pays for ecosystem services
- More generous in the National Park (NP) / clusters
- Outcome based/monitored (less prescriptive)
- Profitable for farmers and value for money for public
- No added bureaucracy
- Do not (inadvertently) penalise those doing good work
- Build confidence for long term delivery
- Evidenced

4 Delivery and practicalities – lessons learned to date

- 4.1 The second session in each workshop – also run through break-out groups - aimed to capture the lessons learned from schemes to date in terms of delivery and practicalities.
- 4.2 Key points made by participants in terms of what has worked well with schemes to date are set out in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1: What's worked well with schemes to date – key points

- Grassland protection/wildflowers, hedge management, margins, overwinter stubble, nectar/pollinator options
- Options which work well with, or fit, the farming system
- Capital payments for scrub clearance and items such as dew ponds
- Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) has worked well for wildlife (unlike the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) scheme)
- Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) principles – *“pick and choose / generic options /simple / easy to achieve”*
- Countryside Stewardship (Mid Tier) works well for small farms
- Catchment sensitive farming – *“useful whilst there”*
- Options under the new schemes are better than those under old schemes
- Digital plan of farm – *“a useful resource”*
- Natural England (NE) and farmer collaboration – *“access to experts and conversations between two parties have been very helpful”*
- Collaboration with other partners (e.g. RSPB, Butterfly Conservation)
- Local advisers – trusted, know area/farms, continuity, capacity to make decisions
- Local advisers – consistency of advice and good decision-making
- Cluster group – easier to talk together and with agencies; facilitation fund
- Clear targets
- Allowed localised approach and monitoring/targeting
- SDNPA support to supplement NE work

- 4.3 Key points made in terms of what's worked less well and the potential solutions are set out in Table 4-2.

Table 4-2: What's worked less well with schemes to date, and potential solutions – key points

[Key: what's worked less well – potential solution(s) (where mentioned)]

- Lack of clarity about what's wanted on farms (e.g. cross compliance vs AES); there have been mixed messages – need clearer objectives
- Shifting goalposts in terms of policies/targets
- Disconnect between different aspects of farming
- Timing/dates, complexity – more flexibility needed
- Too prescriptive – more bespoke approach, more adviser time on-farm required
- ELS low input grassland options, *“not good for conservation and not good for farming”*
- Education/school options, *“muddy”*
- Freezing of payments following inspection - *“could part-payments be made?”*
- Landlord /tenant distribution of payments
- Rural Payments Agency (RPA) / NE / Environment Agency (EA) interface – one agency would be better (e.g. working with farmers, monitoring)
- RPA remote; focus on drawn lines rather than the objective
- Number/turnover of advisers – need fewer advisers, more continuity
- Not monitoring outcomes
- ELS/HLS distinction unhelpful
- Administration – needs to be more effective and efficient, need more education/training for farmers
- Mapping system inaccessible – needed for clusters
- Public access issues including car parking, access by groups, *“(there's been) decreased support from councils due to cuts”*
- SDNPA and NE overlap
- Local authorities don't understand; cost of making planning applications

- 4.4 The participants also identified a number of things missing from schemes to date, see Table 4-3.

Table 4-3: What's been missing from schemes to date – key points

- Clarity on what's wanted on farmland
- Simplicity and flexibility
- Sound evidence base
- Better understanding of schemes and how to implement
- More regular, face-to-face support
- Ability to change (options etc.) within agreement period
- Training for farmers
- Engagement with contract farmers
- Support/incentive for livestock farming and mixed farming
- Support for smaller farms as well as larger farms.
- Support for access, including managing access pressures and public access infrastructure – was in HLS but not in CS (Mid Tier)
- Support for hedgerow trees
- Ongoing advice on habitat management
- Support for heritage
- Support for diversification
- Interpretation – to link public/customers and producers
- Predator control – *“no payments for this, which is so important” “wildlife management, the bit people don't like talking about”*
- More generous support / enhanced payments in NPs and clusters (could be top-ups) – would allow bespoke approach with top-up funding and facilitators.
- Better, more realistic payments for agri-environment management and work – payments which incentivise rather than just make a contribution towards costs. Could identify funding needs locally.
- Consider role for producer organisation schemes to fund environmentally friendly farming and capital investments over and above AES.
- Work out/through issues (e.g. arbitration or similar), don't penalise (RPA)
- Additional on the ground support from SDNPA (e.g. to supplement NE farm adviser support); would need resources, capacity and knowledge.

5 Shaping a future scheme

- 5.1 The third and final session in each workshop – conducted as a plenary discussion – considered what a future scheme might look like and how to market test it.
- 5.2 This section focuses on what a future, permanent scheme(s) might look like i.e. the successor to the current BPS, AES and other RDP schemes. Section 5 summarises feedback relating to a potential pilot scheme in the South Downs, to market test ideas, new ways of working etc.
- 5.3 Key points made by participants in terms of what a future, permanent scheme might look like are set out in Table 5-1. These should be considered headline points, which complement the feedback made earlier in the workshops in terms of priorities, principles, future delivery and practicalities.

Table 5-1: Shaping a future, permanent scheme – key points

- Start afresh - *“a clean sheet, develop new regulations which are British-based”*
- Positive - attractive to the public, meaningful to farmers
- Expectations of public, government, farmers should be made clear
- Value and respect farmers and farming
- Flexible and bespoke at local level – but need to balance with maintaining consistency
- Simple and accessible to all types/sizes of business (like ELS)
- Training for farmers (what's of value on the farm, rationale for management etc.)
- Advice and consultancy for farmers when setting up new agreements
- Education – schools, public – including why farmers need to be paid for certain aspects of their work
- Communication – broader society - *“need communication support to tell our story better”*
“National Park can help disseminate this”. This includes *“better information, signage, apps etc. to show what farmers are doing and how they are improving the environment in the area people are living in / visiting”*.
- Be clear on environmental benefits
- Link into utility companies in terms of joint working/benefits
- Recognise farmers are there to produce food. Include factors that assist with this (e.g. risk management, insurance)
- Consider kite mark / provenance scheme for local produce:
 - Recognise the local market – *“two million people around the Park”*.
 - Promote 'South Downs' over county-based brands
 - Promote grass-fed meat and get a premium for it
 - Provide support to build 'added value' (e.g. produce ready meals etc.)
- Consider investing in local infrastructure (e.g. abattoirs, cutting and processing plants).

- Recognise the vulnerability of farm businesses to declining support
- 'Son of Basic Payment'. Current split (Pillar I and II) or a combined scheme? Both make sense. However some basic farm support should remain.
- Devolution to lowest level e.g. clusters
- Get timing and transition right – “*don't leave farmers high and dry*”

5.4 It is fair to say that there was not unanimity on all points made in terms of a future scheme. For example, there were differing views on whether basic farm support should be delivered as a standalone scheme or not, whether there should be a wholly outcome-based approach or not, and whether a local produce scheme and/or brand should be included.

6 Developing a pilot scheme

- 6.1 This section brings together participants' views on developing a pilot scheme in the South Downs to market test ideas, new ways of working etc. thereby contributing to a future, permanent scheme.
- 6.2 Discussion around a pilot scheme formed part of all three workshops, however it was a particular focus of the second and third workshops, building on the preliminary feedback from the first workshop.
- 6.3 Key points made by participants in terms of what a pilot scheme might do and look like are set out in Table 6-1. Items in square brackets [] have been added in by the author for information/completeness.

Table 6-1: Developing a pilot scheme in the South Downs – key points

- South Downs Unique Selling Points (USPs)
 - National Park (NPA) led/co-ordinated
 - Cluster way of working – up and running already – so could develop / add to
 - Commercial businesses and small farms
 - Lowland landscape/habitats – parkland, biodiverse grassland, woodland, connecting habitats (hedgerows, margins), water
 - Mixed/livestock farming
 - Visitors and surrounding population
- What would a pilot scheme do 'on farm'?
 - Go above and beyond Stewardship (build on existing BPS/AES framework) – *“wary about opting out without certainty”*
 - Have objectives that take account of all the variables (markets, weather etc.)
 - Be simple, straightforward, effective
 - Operate at cluster scale. Involve clusters in local design and delivery i.e. identify funding needs, ensure funds go to work required, guide, monitor etc. - *“Cluster better than trying to do Park-wide”*. Different clusters/cluster groups could pilot different elements.
 - Support profitable farming, maintain viability for next generation, keep labour on the land
 - Address specific local priorities e.g. soils, carbon, water quality, visitor management, habitats and species (including connectivity, scrub clearance), pollinators, landscape and heritage, education, health and well-being, local food, diversification (building on LEADER), viable/profitable livestock farming and mixed farming including livestock infrastructure [will need to prioritise and be selective]
 - Outcome-based – personalised to farm
 - Pay for management/actions/work that cost/take profit from farms – *“should reflect real costs of work and make things profitable”*

- Use innovative methods (e.g. providing training for farmers; rewarding farmers relative to visitor numbers; incentivising health and well-being delivery; scrappage scheme to support investment in new technology e.g. precision farming, risk management)
- Promote a co-operative/collaborative model between farms (e.g. investment in machinery)
- Have SDNPA support alongside NE farm adviser support
- Engage partners (e.g. water companies through Payments for Ecosystems Services, and NGOs) so working and investing together (and avoiding conflicting messages)
- What might be involved in a 'wrap around' programme of activities?
 - Communication – SDNPA role, social media, national/local communication, link to academia/universities - “*find ways for farmers to tell their stories*”
 - Education – schools (e.g. use model of 'Forest Schools' on farms; get youngsters working on farms) and general public
 - Demonstrate value to communities, HM Treasury etc. (natural capital)
 - R&D – on farm (e.g. pollinators, soil/water/carbon, rotational grass in arable, enhancing permanent grassland) and wider (e.g. link PhD projects to farm/farmer issues/needs).
- Practicalities
 - [Timescale- next 2-3 years]
 - [Budget (TBC)]
 - Delivery bodies (SDNPA, NE etc.)
 - [Target outputs and outcomes]
 - Monitoring and evaluation – “*light touch monitoring*”

Annex – Workshop Participants

Arun to Adur Farmers' Group Workshop – 28 April 2017	
<u>Farmers, farm advisers</u> Alex Lock Dominic Gardener Andrew Passmore Annie Brown Caroline Harriott Colin Hedley Clem Somerset + 1 David Harriott Jon Hutcheon + 1 Mike Tristram Paul Strudwick Peter Knight Rick Goring	Robert Ayling Stephen Woodley Toby Jenkins +1 <u>SDNPA staff, other</u> Andrew Lee Bruce Fowkes, RSPB Jackie Nicholls Nick Heasman Nigel Hiscoke, NE Nigel James Paul Silcock Simon Mockford Susan Simpson, NE
Selborne Landscape Partnership & Winchester Downs Joint Farmers' Group Workshop – 31 May 2017	
<u>Farmers, farm advisers</u> Nicola Barber Will Brock Kate Faulkner Dick Hall Hamish Janson Mervyn Roger-Smith Penny Stokes Liz Try David Uren	Katherine Wake Dulce Wightman William Wolmer <u>SDNPA staff, other.</u> Andrew Lee Anne Rehill Jackie Nicholls Nigel James Paul Silcock Rob Nicholls
Eastern Downs Farmers' Group Workshop – 20 June 2017	
<u>Farmers, farm advisers</u> Annie Brown Richard Brown Edward Brown Alistair Deighton Duncan Ellis Richard James David Larkin Fred Lucas Camilla Puzey David Robinson Ben Taylor Sue Thomson Anthony Weston	Tony Mannington David Taylor David Lardon Tim Armour <u>SDNPA staff, other.</u> Andrew Lee Chirs Fairbrother Dave Burges, NPE Jackie Nicholls Nigel James Paul Silcock Shia Gilad, NE Vicky Lawrence