

**SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**AUTHORITY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Held at 10.30am on 21 October 2021 in the Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre, North Street, Midhurst, West Sussex, GU29 9DH.

Present:

Alun Alesbury, Heather Baker, Annie Brown, Tim Burr, Peter Diplock, Chris Dowling, Janet Duncton, Barbara Holyome, Melanie Hunt, Doug Jones, Maggie Jones, Diana van der Klugt, Russell Oppenheimer, Martin Osborne, Henry Potter, Vanessa Rowlands, Andrew Shaxson, Isabel Thurston, Richard Waring and Stephen Whale.

South Downs National Park Authority Officers:

Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive), Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy and Management), Tim Slaney (Director of Planning), Louise Read (Monitoring Officer), Nigel Manvell (Chief Finance Officer), Alan Brough (Head of Business Services), Robin Parr (Head of Governance) and Richard Sandiford (Senior Governance Officer).

Also attended by:

Andy Conlan (External Auditor), Mike Hughes (Major Planning Projects and Performance Manager), Claire Kerr (Countryside and Policy Manager), Laura Warren (Events and Engagement Officer), Kirsten Williamson (Planning Policy Lead) and James Winkworth (Head of Marketing and Income Generation).

**CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS**

46. The Deputy Chair of the Authority welcomed all present, informed them of general housekeeping matters and that, in the absence of the Chair of the Authority, she would be chairing this meeting.
47. Members and members of the public were reminded that SDNPA Members had a primary responsibility for ensuring that the Authority furthered 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.
48. The Chair informed the Authority that agenda items 16 and 17 were to note. These items were taken as noted as no Member indicated that they had any matters related to these items that they wished to discuss.

**ITEM 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

49. Apologies were received from Angus Dunn, Therese Evans, Gary Marsh, William Meyer, Robert Mocatta, and Ian Phillips.

**ITEM 2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

50. The following declarations were made:
  - Doug Jones declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 8
  - Chris Dowling declared a public service interest in Agenda Items 12 and 14 as an East Sussex County Councillor.
  - Martin Osbourne declared a public service interest as a Brighton and Hove City Councillor in Agenda Items 12 and 14

**ITEM 3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 6 JULY 2021**

51. The minutes of the Authority meeting held on 25 March 2021 was approved as a correct record.

**ITEM 4. MATTERS ARISING**

52. There were none.

**ITEM 5. URGENT ITEMS**

53. There were none.

**ITEM 6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

54. There was none.

**ITEM 7. NEED FOR PART II EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

55. Members were asked to consider the exclusion of the public, including the press, from the meeting for Agenda Item 18.

56. The Monitoring Officer outlined the reasons for the consideration of this exclusion under paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, being information related to the financial and business affairs of a particular person including the Authority, and information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings and that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exempt information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information. This conclusion was reached on the basis that whilst there was a public interest in the transparency of Authority proceedings, it was felt that on balance this was outweighed by the requirement of the Authority to be able to fully consider the implications of its actions and proposed actions in relation to the Section 101 agreements for the ongoing delivery of its planning service without the disclosure of information that could have undermined its position or its ability to deliver value for money through these processes.

57. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to move into private session to consider Agenda Item 18 and that the public, including the press, would be excluded from the meeting at the appropriate time.

**ITEM 8. AUTHORITY CHAIR UPDATE**

58. The Authority Deputy Chair invited any comments on report (NPA21/22-06).

59. Members made the following comments:

- It was understood that the Authority Chair was arranging a meeting with Members of Hampshire County Council to discuss the current issues around Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATS). A good outcome would be working towards a joint meeting between the SDNPA, Hampshire County Council (HCC) and Parish Councils. There could be an opportunity for the SDNPA to play a more active leadership role as there was concern that the perceived lack of action by the SDNPA could be affecting the Authority's reputation.
- It would be useful for the Chair to meet with Maria Caulfield, MP for Lewes.

60. Members were advised:

- The matter of BOATs would be scheduled for discussion at a Member Workshop.

61. **RESOLVED:** The Authority noted the update from the Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority.

**ITEM 9. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S PROGRESS REPORT**

62. The Chief Executive introduced report (NPA21/22-07) and reminded Members of the content. The Chief Executive also gave the following updates:

- Glover Response - There had not yet been any final decision on the response to the Glover review, but the response was planned to be released in December 2021. National Parks England (NPE) had made the case for a non-statutory National Landscape Service.

- Water Neutrality - Unless new dwellings in the affected area could demonstrate water neutrality planning permission could not be granted, but this would not affect household or commercial extensions.
- Officers were considering the Governments new Net Zero strategy and updates would be given over the next couple of weeks.
- A landscape enhancement initiative for Butser Hill had been allocated £170k from the National Grid.

63. Members made the following comments:

- Were there any issues on Oxenbourne Down, the neighbouring National Nature Reserve to Butser Hill and, if so, could the fund be used there also?
- It was important that projects that had been allocated large amounts of CIL funds were exemplars for sustainability. Was this part of the criteria when evaluating projects?
- Did the water neutrality issue affect the whole of the SDNP? Also, were applications being refused or not determined?
- Was the Authority also working with Hampshire Local Nature Partnership (LNP) on nature recovery in a similar way to our work with Sussex LNP?
- The Colour of Chalk writing project and podcast were very good.
- Was it known when the Centurion Way was likely to reopen? It would be good for local communities to be updated, perhaps using the Friends of Centurion Way Facebook page.
- The FIPL team were commended for so effectively allocating the funds.
- Would there be additional grazing at Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) as the current Sussex Cattle would not make a significant difference?
- What impact was inflation having on the SDNPA's budget and what were the future risks to the Authority?
- Was anything further known on the comprehensive spending review?
- How was the figure of 15000 visitor interactions reached, was this in person or through other means also?

64. Members were advised:

- There was significant ranger and volunteer activity on Oxenbourne Down, but the National Grid funds could only be used at Butser Hill.
- The criteria for evaluating projects for CIL funding was very robust and the aim was always for exemplar schemes.
- The water neutrality issue only affected part of the SDNP, mainly in the northern part of Chichester District and Horsham District centred around the rivers Rother and Arun. Wherever possible time was being extended on applications, but agents and applicants were also looking at how they could prove water neutrality.
- The Authority was working with all Local Nature Recovery Partnerships.
- West Dean Estate was undertaking the work on Centurion Way. It was agreed that it would be good to update the local communities.
- The grazing at SSCP was done in partnership with Plumpton College and they would be putting the animals on the site, the current cattle was just the start. The work with Plumpton was also seen as a good educational opportunity.
- Inflation was one of the key issues considered by Members at the first budget workshop. There would be a second budget workshop for Members before the December NPA

meeting where this would be considered further. All Members were encouraged to attend this.

- The 15000 interactions was a figure of actual discussions undertaken on the events van at SSCP between SDNPA staff and members of the public.

65. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to note the progress made by the South Downs National Park Authority (the Authority) since the last report.

#### **ITEM 10. SUMMARY OF THE WILD CHALK FESTIVAL**

66. The Events and Engagement Officer provided a verbal update to Members on the Wild Chalk Festival.

67. The Chief Executive and Members thanked Laura Warren for her work over the entire 11 years of the SDNPA.

#### **ITEM 11. PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN DELIVERY – NATURE RECOVERY**

68. The Countryside and Policy Manager – Eastern Downs introduced report (NPA21/22-08) and reminded Members of the content.

69. The Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee informed Members that the Committee had interrogated this fully at their meeting and it was felt this work should not be delayed. The biodiversity monitoring framework was an important tool and would help to assess progress on the ground. This work was central to the future work of the SDNPA.

70. Members made the following comments:

- Did the SDNPA discuss nature recovery with the larger landowners?
- How would we demonstrate the achievements in nature recovery as the public may want to know how much had been regained? Although, the challenges in measuring this should not be underestimated.
- It was important for the public to understand this was not a rewilding campaign and this would also require careful messaging when discussing nature recovery with landowners, farmers and local communities to get them on board.
- The upcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) would map out how the land could be divided out between the strategies, but if it was considered that the SDNP boundary would be a more sensible area for an LNRS should the Authority be actively pushing that?
- The call for sites was good. How would Members be updated on progress?
- Care needed to be taken when considering taking land out of agricultural use.
- Although these were hugely complex issues the market was pressing forward in monetising ecology.
- The recent parish webinar discussed this and showed some other excellent films and case studies.
- Members on the Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document Task and Finish Group could take a final look at the document with nature recovery specifically in mind. Attention could perhaps be paid to areas such as roadside verges, of which there was a good pilot in Froxfield.
- It was important that the focus was not just on bringing the funding in but putting information out for smaller landowners and the general public to get involved to and help to achieve our objective.
- Did the SDNPA have a policy on phosphate use?

71. Members were advised:
- The SDNPA was in dialogue with the larger landowners on this.
  - Measuring success would be a challenge. There was a biological monitoring framework in place and the aim was for this to be an accessible approach for both us and partners. While metrics were being developed, the SDNPA was not developing our own, we were part of the larger evolving picture. There would also be a log of projects and initiatives so a picture of evolving success could be built up and case studies would also play an important role.
  - The LNRS consultation was currently live and that would define the details. SDNPA was actively speaking to partners, including Tier 1 Local Authorities, who had already been approached by Defra on the subject of LNRS', whereas National Parks had not.
  - There would be a report before Members in due course on the call for sites.
  - Green Finance was a fast-moving area; however, the Authority was in a good position to benefit from funding opportunities. The Authority also had a strong ethics charter to ensure any company was reducing as far as possible before offsetting.
  - The SDNPA followed national guidance on phosphates.
72. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to:
1. Adopt the South Downs Wildlife Delivery Plan (Appendix 3) and South Downs Nature Recovery Delivery Prospectus (Appendix 4), including its high-level targets and opportunity map.
  2. Note the launch of the South Downs Nature Recovery Campaign “#ReNature”.
  3. Note the proposed approach to Biodiversity Net Gain and a Call for Nature Sites.
73. Janet Duncton left the meeting at 12.15pm.

**ITEM 12. AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2020/21 AND LETTER OF REPRESENTATION**

74. The Chief Finance Officer introduced report (NPA21/22-09), reminded Members of the content and gave the following updates on amendments that would be required.
- All outstanding audit queries had been concluded and the accounts and Letter of Representation were unchanged.
  - In order to meet the statutory publication deadline, the accounts were published with a note to say that there were outstanding audit queries, but they were published in the name of the Chair of P&R Committee, however, this would need to change to the Chair of this meeting. The Letter of Representation would also need to be amended to reflect its approval at this meeting rather than by P&R Committee.
75. The Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee informed Members that the Committee had scrutinised the accounts and audit reports at P&R Committee, however, as there was some uncertainty around the final audit results and the external auditor was not present at the meeting to provide a verbal update it was not felt appropriate to agree the recommendations before the Committee.
76. Members made the following comments:
- Had the Authority met the deadline to approve the Audited Statement of Accounts? If not, what were the implications?
77. Members were advised:
- The deadline was for publication rather than approval of the Accounts and the Authority did meet the deadline for this.
78. It was proposed, seconded and agreed to amend recommendation 2 to include the words “subject to the amendments set out at the meeting”.

79. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to:
1. Note the Commentary on the Statement of Accounts set out in Appendix 1.
  2. Approve the audited Statement of Accounts 2020/21 as set out in Appendix 2 subject to the amendments set out at the meeting.
  3. Approve the Letter of Representation as set out in Appendix 3 subject to the amendments set out at the meeting.

**ITEM 13. EXTERNAL AUDIT – AUDIT RESULTS REPORT 2020/21**

80. The External Auditor introduced the report (NPA21/22-10) and reminded Members of the content.
81. Members made the following comments:
- Would the Audit Report be updated to reflect the fact that there were no longer any outstanding items and that this was being approved at this meeting?
82. Members were advised:
- It was not unusual for an audit report to come for approval with outstanding issues, however, an updated report would be issued.
83. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to receive and consider the findings as set out in the 2020/21 Audit Results Report.
84. Janet Duncton returned to the meeting at 1.05pm.

**ITEM 14. APPROVAL OF EAST SUSSEX, SOUTH DOWNS AND BRIGHTON & HOVE WASTE AND MINERALS LOCAL PLAN REVIEW REGULATION 19 CONSULTATION**

85. The Planning Policy Lead introduced the report (NPA21/22-11) and reminded Members of the content.
86. The Chair of the Planning Committee informed Members that the Committee had considered this in detail, had a significant discussion on the matter, and were happy to commend the report to the Authority.
87. Members made the following comments:
- Would sustainable use of aggregates and low aggregate construction methods be part of the upcoming Design Guide?
88. Members were advised:
- The content of the Design Guide would be a matter for members of the Task and Finish Group to consider alongside all the consultation responses, however, there was already reference to sustainable forms of development.
89. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to:
1. Approve the consultation draft of the East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan Review, as detailed in Appendix 1 of this report, for Regulation 19 Consultation in autumn/winter 2021 subject to any comments made by the National Park Authority being addressed, and subject to any minor changes that arise prior to the start of the Regulation 19 publication being agreed by the Director of Planning in consultation with East Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council.
  2. Note the main issues arising from Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and the Habitat Regulation Assessment Screening document (HRA) as set out in Section 3 of the report.
  3. Delegate authority to the Director of Planning in consultation with the Chair of the Authority, East Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council, to make any minor changes arising from the consultation and then submit the Waste and Minerals

Local Plan Review to the Secretary of State under regulation 22 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 for examination.

4. Note that if major changes are required to the East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan Review that a further public consultation and decision by the Authority may be required.

**ITEM 15. GOVERNANCE MATTERS**

90. The Head of Governance and Support Services introduced the report (NPA21/22-12) and reminded Members of the content.
91. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to:
  1. Approve the amended Terms of Reference for the Policy and Resources Committee as set out at Appendix 1
  2. Approve the amended SDNPA General Delegation of Authority to the Chief Executive and Directors as set out at Appendix 2
  3. Agree to appoint Authority Member Peter Diplock to the Policy and Resources Committee
  4. Agree to amend Standing Order 8.3 and Appendix 2, paragraphs 3.1(a) and 4.1(a) of Standing Orders for Regulation of Authority Proceedings and Business as set out at Appendix 3 of this report to provide that Co-opted Members of Committees are not eligible to be elected as Chair or Deputy Chair of committees.

**ITEM 16. PLANNING COMMITTEE MINUTES**

92. It was queried why an amendment to the minutes of the 9 September 2021 Planning Committee were not reflected in the minutes included for this item?
93. Officers confirmed that the amendment was not reflected in the minutes included for this item due to the dispatch of reports for this meeting taking place prior to the meeting of the Planning Committee where the amendment to the minutes was agreed. It was, however, confirmed that the amendment had been made to the confirmed minutes.
94. Authority Members noted the minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held on 10 June, 12 August and 9 September 2021.

**ITEM 17 POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES**

95. Authority Members noted the minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 15 July 2021.
96. Diana van der Klugt left the meeting at 1.20pm.

**PART II EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

97. The meeting was closed to the public, including the press, and moved into private session at 1.20pm.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

