

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**  
Date **24 March 2022**  
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 provides an overview of my activities since my report to the 16 December 2021 NPA.
- 1.2 Just as the Covid-related restrictions on meetings and movement have reduced, so the pace of events and activities has picked up. But my engagements in the period since my last report have been largely dominated by the government's long-awaited response to the Glover Review of National Landscapes.

**2. Government's Response to the Landscapes Review - Consultation**

- 2.1 It has been illuminating to see how this has evolved since Glover's Report in September 2019 through discussions and meetings between ministers, senior Defra officials, representatives from protected landscapes and Natural England and others. The consultation paper was published on 15 January and includes a number of positive proposals, but is silent on or does not adequately address a number of Glover's recommendations and poses serious challenges regarding the resources, notably finance, available for delivery.
- 2.2 Following a pre-publication meeting between Defra and representatives from all NPAs and AONBs, I had a meeting with Secretary of State Eustice, Lord Benyon, Julian Glover and the Chairs of National Parks England (NPE) and National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) and the CEO of Natural England in early January. These issues were discussed in more detail and I have had subsequent meetings with the NPE Chair and Chief Officer to consider these further.
- 2.3 NPE will be preparing a response to the consultation on behalf of its member authorities that will address common strategic issues, with an emphasis on the need for adequate resources for NPAs to deliver on the government's agenda. NPE is also interested in how the proposed National Landscape Partnership will evolve. This is perceived as a body comprising senior representatives from NPE, NAAONB, National Parks Partnership and National Trails with a focus on delivering the Government's environmental agenda.

- 2.4 Individual NPAs will be producing responses that reflect the distinctive nature and context of each Authority and, in doing so, will be reinforcing the point that ‘one size does not fit all’ and that local accountability and representation are important in delivering National Park purposes. The SDNPA’s proposed response is being considered at this meeting. It includes the results of a well attended Member workshop in late January and the recommendations of a Member Task and Finish Group that has considered in detail the implications of the Government paper’s questions on governance.
- 2.5 I have also participated in the Landscape Institute’s (LI) consideration of the government consultation, incidentally together with several other Institute members with close links to the SDNPA and New Forest. Whilst the perspective in this case was understandably influenced by the interests and opportunities relevant to the profession, there was a strong correlation between the views of the LI and those emerging from the SDNPA.

### **3. Other National Issues**

- 3.1 NPE was able to produce an early press release reacting to the Landscape Consultation. NPE’s Board meeting in January confirmed NPE’s continuing focus on its four delivery plans of Sustainable Farming, Climate Leadership, Access For Everyone and Wildlife - and liaison with Defra on these. NPE is planning to host two APPG meetings in 2022 on the Landscapes Review and Sustainable Farming and Land Management. NPE also continues to liaise with Natural England and the NAAONB in the light of the recently established tripartite agreement between these parties. NPE will also be reviewing its governance and member subscription arrangements in the coming year and awaits with interest Defra’s proposals on potential roles of organisations within the proposed National Landscape Partnership and clarity on the Partnership’s objectives.
- 3.2 Natural England has now appointed its Landscape Advisory Panel (NELAP) which has a broad remit beyond protected landscapes and which will provide expert inputs and advice directly to the NE Board. I attended an online webinar in March hosted by NE and covering wide-ranging issues: the expansion of existing protected landscapes, designations for national city parks and marine areas, the implications for non-designated landscape areas and rural development; the role of the European Landscape Convention; access; wildlife and nature recovery and joined up landscape / green / natural area networks. Natural England therefore appears to be reviving the broader landscape interests that it incorporated when the Countryside Agency was absorbed into English Nature.
- 3.3 On a solemn note, I was very sad to learn of the death on 1 March of Mike McKinley, Chair of the Lake District National Park and former Chair of National Parks England. I had the pleasure of several meetings with him and enjoyed and relished his robust held views, good sense and good humour together with his passion for the Lake District and all our National Parks. He leaves behind a significant legacy and many fond memories.

### **4. Ongoing Projects**

- 4.1 At a more local level, I have been working closely with Members and Officers on the emerging Design SPD, particularly on the new section on trees, and I look forward to this document progressing to adoption in the coming months and supporting our landscape led approach to new development. I am also working with Members and officers to progress the Area Action Plan for Shoreham Cement Works and hope that this will help to guide an exceptional quality of development in this unique and important site.
- 4.2 I have also enjoyed a recent visit to the Seven Sisters Country Park to review construction progress there. I am very impressed by how the quality of visitor facilities and interpretation is being transformed under the new management – and also by the enthusiasm of the staff who are working there or are involved in the construction work. I am confident that this site will become a flagship for the Park and a showcase for sensitive building restoration and landscape management. I have invited Lord Benyon to visit the Park in the near future and would welcome the opportunity to show him how Seven Sisters can combine promotion of the Park’s purposes with commercial opportunities.

## **5. Member Survey**

- 5.1 Members were invited to complete a questionnaire in early February and there has been a strong and informative response. In particular, the survey has highlighted a high degree of satisfaction amongst Members with the quality of services provided, with the Authority's outputs and performance and, notably, a sense of high motivation perceived amongst both staff and members. The results of the survey are being analysed and are likely to lead to proposals which will affect some of our working arrangements. These are being discussed by the Members' Task and Finish Group that was convened to consider the governance issues in the Landscape Review consultation.

## **6. Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs)**

- 6.1 Authority Members participated in a well-attended workshop to consider the complex issues relating to BOATs, which remain a particularly sensitive issue in parts of Hampshire and which are accorded some special and extensive attention in the government's landscape consultation document. An independent consultant gave a comprehensive and informative presentation on the legal and policy complexities and was followed by Hampshire County Council's Countryside Strategic Manager explaining the County's practices and procedures. Other speakers provided further insight and Members were able to have a robust and informed discussion, which resulted in some new perspectives. The Authority has agreed to consider the issue further at the formal Authority meeting in May and will be setting out its responses to the relevant questions in the government consultation.

## **7. Other Meetings**

- 7.1 I have had several meetings with our local authority partners to discuss matters of mutual interest including planning issues, access and nature recovery. Transport for the South East (TfSE) has commissioned studies of transport routes in the south east and I have joined stakeholder workshops reviewing the A259 between Brighton and Eastbourne. These indicated strong support for promoting active transport, segregated or off road cycleways, public transport improvements and measures to mitigate north-south severance in settlements and to the Park area.
- 7.2 I have had an informative meeting with Jonathan Russell, CEO of the Cowdray Estate, where I learned much about the background, challenges and current aspirations of the Estate. I was also able to promote our encouragement of Whole Estate Plans (WEPs) as a practical mechanism for the Park Authority to liaise with and support the management of larger landholdings.
- 7.3 I have also had a recent meeting with Gillian Keegan MP, Minister for Health and Social Care. We had a very useful discussion covering the landscape review, farming, health and wellbeing and the levelling up white paper. I was able to advance the Authority's argument for the funding needed to deliver the wide-ranging aspirations in the Glover Review. Ms. Keegan was also receptive to my observations that the Levelling Up White Paper from DLUHC makes no mention of Natural Capital and fails to recognise the very positive role that National Parks can play in providing education, recreation and health and wellbeing benefits to all members of society.
- 7.4 Finally, I am impressed by the aspirations set out in the evolving Brighton and Hove City Council WEP for its extensive Downland Estate. This is such a large and significant area of land which has the potential to connect the urban community on the coast with the National Park's iconic rolling Downs and demonstrate how the rural landscape provides vital, life supporting services. I look forward to seeing how BHCC is able to work with the National Park in taking its proposals forward.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 I have set out in this report my key activities and events since 16 December. I am happy to follow up any issues on which Members would like more detail or would like to discuss further 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](mailto:committee.officer@southdowns.gov.uk)