

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

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 25 NOVEMBER 2021

Held at the Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre, Midhurst at 10.30am

Present: Annie Brown, Tim Burr, Angus Dunn, Melanie Hunt (Chair), Doug Jones, Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Michael Lunn, Isabel Thurston and Stephen Whale.

Independent (CIPFA) Co-opted Members of the Committee: Tom Fourcade and Carole Nicholson

Co-opted Members of the Committee: Morris Findley and Lawrence Leather

Other SDNPA Members: Ian Phillips and Barbara Holyome

SDNPA Officers: Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & 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 Catherine Sydenham (Committee Officer).

Also Attended by: Anne Rehill (Performance and Project Manager), Nick Heasman (Countryside and Policy Manager – Central Downs), Mark Alden (Enterprise Development Lead), Tanya Hibberd (Claire Kerr (Countryside and Policy Manager – Eastern Downs), Jeremy Burgess (Landscape and Biodiversity Lead – Water) and Mark Winton (Chief Internal Auditor).

OPENING REMARKS

I00. The Chair opened the meeting

I01. 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.

I02. Within the opening remarks the Chair:

- Drew attention to the risk grid tabled and members were advised that in future the impacts of the risk column would be left blank for each member of the Committee to draw their own conclusions and reflections. This should act as a prompt to ensure that all members are considering risk to the work of the Authority and checking that management responses have taken account of these.
- Welcomed Peter Diplock to the Committee.

ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

I03. Apologies were received from Peter Diplock, Henry Potter and Martin Osborne.

ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

I04. Stephen Whale declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 15, as a Director of South Downs Commercial Operations Limited and was not present for this item.

ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 30TH SEPTEMBER 2021

I05. The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 30TH September 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

106. The following updates were given to the Committee:

- The Chair updated the Committee in regards to minutes 76 & 80 that the actions in both the Annual Governance Statement and the Human Resources and the Health and Safety report would now be reported quarterly as part of the Performance and Projects Report to the Committee.
- The Head of Governance and Support Services updated the Committee that the discussions which were referred to in minute 62 had now taken place.
- The Director of Countryside and Policy management referred to minute 50 and updated the Committee that the next meeting of the South Downs Partnership (SDP) had taken place recently and focussed on Communications & Engagement, along with how the SDP might respond to the forthcoming Defra consultation on Protected Landscapes.

ITEM 5: URGENT MATTERS

107. There were none

ITEM 6: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

108. There were no Members of the public who had requested to speak.

ITEM 7: NEED FOR PART II EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

109. Officers advised that there was no requirement to consider any item in private session.

110. Barbara Holyome joined the meeting.

ITEM 8: PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN DELIVERY – HEALTH AND WELLBEING

111. The Performance and Projects Manager introduced report PR21/22-19 and reminded members of the report contents.

112. Angus Dunn joined the meeting.

113. The Committee commented that:

- There was support that the Authority's focus would be shifted towards creating information and supporting the development of activities that social prescribers could refer people to. Additionally, Officers would work to ensure that community action and support efforts should also focus on engaging with diverse groups and minority communities and not just developing stereotypical activities of walking and cycling routes.
- It was supported that SDNPA was part of the National Academy of Social Prescribing and that opportunities should be kept open for future partnership working should the emerging legislation be approved .
- It was hoped that the work in Adur and Worthing to allow nature into public open spaces could be rolled out into other Local Authority areas.
- More engagement with the student population within the SDNP was needed, particularly to engage with those people with mental health issues, and a suggestion of establishing more links with the universities.
- As well as providing access, the creation of health and wellbeing hubs could also be used as information hubs for other purposes such as the climate emergency.
- Transport was critical and there needed to be a bolder vision for how community groups would gain access to the SDNP where transport was a barrier.
- It would be helpful to see a list of organisations that SDNPA could be partnering with along with a map to show the geographical spread.

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114. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- Work streams would be prioritised as part of the Corporate Plan process to those that were likely to have the most impact and this included activities that could make the most difference. An impact framework would be created.
 - Health and Wellbeing was a difficult area to measure overall. Measurement of direct engagement was possible and the visitor survey could provide statistics on the diversity of people using the National Park.
 - Public Transport was not always the most effective method of transport for people accessing social prescribing and SDNPA was involved in conversations and bids to try and find new ways of enabling people to access prescribed activities.
115. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
1. Note progress on delivering the Health and Well Being Strategy
 2. Note the implications for the “Transforming Lives” section of the emerging 2022-2025 refresh of the Corporate Plan
 3. Support the direction of travel for future work

ITEM 9: WHOLE ESTATE PLANS (WEP) UPDATE

116. The Enterprise Development Lead and Countryside and Policy Manager (Central Downs) introduced report PR21/22-20 and reminded members of the report content.
117. The Committee commented that:
- The Land use Consultants (LUC) review was an example of transparent learning.
 - The recent visits to estates have been interesting and helpful to tie together the Partnership Management Plan (PMP) Outcomes and Priorities as well as aiding Members’ understanding. The new additional WEP analysis of delivery towards the PMP outcomes was an important step forward within the WEP process.
 - Within the emerging Whole Estate Plan guidance it stated that ‘*The WEP’s are seen as a Memorandum of Understanding with the agreed Action Plan which shapes the future working relationship between the SDNPA and the Estate*’, question was raised as to whether this is something that estates would feel comfortable signing up to?
 - Most of the SDNP landscape was managed by people other than SDNPA and WEPs prompted an effective dialogue between the SDNPA and the estates themselves, in addition to providing a powerful tool with mutual benefits to both. WEPs were a powerful communication tool delivering both the Statutory Purposes and the Duty, as well as bridging together countryside and planning.
 - There had to be a real benefit for an estate or farm to put their private business into the public domain. The partnership relationship between landlord and tenant was complex and should have shared success outcomes.
 - The LUC assessment did not include any information on monitoring PMP Outcomes 2 &3 and a question was raised as to whether it would be helpful for WEPs to contain a biodiversity action plan?
 - In order to help the SDNPA decide which estates to progress there should be clear criteria in order that decisions can be made of where SDNPA efforts should be focussed.
 - It may be helpful to add a section of the possible benefits of undertaking a WEP to the guidance along with some positive quotes from estates who already had endorsed WEPs.

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118. In response to questions Officers clarified that:
- Progress on the Firlie Whole Estate Plan has been paused whilst the estate's new Manager ensured that there was alignment between the strategic direction being created and the WEP itself.
 - The management of WEPs was moved from the Planning Directorate to the Countryside and Policy Directorate to ensure that there was no ambiguity and to facilitate conversations on land management, including Nature Recovery and Climate Change, and not just that land use. The move had also ensured that emphasis was placed on PMP outcomes and not only planning outcomes.
 - The inconsistency of planning language throughout the emerging revised whole estate plan guidance would be addressed so that it was consistent, with a suggestion of using the words from Local Plan Policy SD25 of '*positive regard*'.
 - A couple of the estates with endorsed WEPs had put forward sites for Nature Recovery as part of the Nature Recovery call for sites campaign.
 - The WEP team were looking not only for protection of species on the estate but also enhancements, which would be added to the guidance.
 - The main aim was to have good quality endorsed WEPs. The WEP team received lots of enquiries and reasons why progress halted was different for every estate as no two estates were the same. Some of the reasons given for delay included economic costs and estate succession planning. When agreeing with estates that they were ready to begin the WEP process Officers were mindful of SDNPA capacity to also deliver with a maximum number of reserved site visit dates each year.
 - A few of the endorsed estates had been championing the benefits of having an endorsed WEP. Through the WEP process opportunities such as payments for ecosystem services and areas for Nature Recovery could be identified.
 - The annual action plan review meeting with the estate was about maintaining the relationship with the estate and not being an inspector.
 - Micro WEPs were aimed primarily at farms and small estates where there was not a great complexity, but allowed them to stop and think and future proof their business. Those with larger and more complex estates would not be allowed to take this route. Further discussions would take place on whether 'Micro WEPs' and 'WEP Lites' should be an option.
 - The Planning team were trialling calling in all applications from estates where there were endorsed WEPs.
119. The Committee were advised that it was not within the Committee's Terms of Reference to agree the revised WEP Guidance. Officers had delegated powers to agree the revised guidance and confirmed that they would take on board comments raised at the Committee.
120. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
- 1) Note the outcomes from the recently completed Whole Estate Plan Evaluation conducted by LUC (Land Use Consultants) and the progress made to implement the new Whole Estate Plan process
 - 2) Endorse the emerging revised Whole Estate Plan Guidance detailed at section 4 and Appendix I.
 - 3) Consider and note the performance of the Whole Estate Programme, and the current Whole Estate Plan pipeline.
121. Ian Phillips left the meeting

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ITEM 10: Q2 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE REPORT

122. The Performance and Research Lead introduced report PR21/22-21 and gave the following update:
- From Quarter 3 the performance report would be presented around outcomes.
 - The following updates were given for the priority areas with an amber RAG status:
 - The Ambassadors Schools programme had an amber status due to Covid-19 but it was hoped that the programme would resume in Quarter 3.
 - The learning from the Whole Estate Plan review had now been considered and this action would be Green for Quarter 3.
 - Funding sources were still being investigated for the work with parishes but the work stream was not prioritised.
 - The newly appointed Research and Evidence Officer had now started and the set up of thematic research networks along with the monitoring of the SDNPA and partner delivery against PMP outcomes would be back on track in Quarter 3.
 - Work to secure long term accommodation for area offices was currently on hold whilst blended working across the Authority became embedded.
 - An update was given on the Red RAG status that the introduction of a pre application fee charging schedule had been deprioritised to allow other work streams to take priority but there was now progress on this action.
123. The Committee commented that:
- Blended working arrangements and the ability for Members to join non-decision making meetings was helpful to busy workloads.
 - It would be helpful if HR trend data could be reported on a quarterly basis in order that the committee can compare the same quarter to the previous year to identify any material differences in the data.
124. In response to questions Officers clarified that:
- The Seven Sisters contract was fixed price as far as possible and at the current point in time there was no pressure on costs due to rising inflation, but Officers were aware that this may come in the future. Officers were having regular discussions with the contractors.
 - Inflation on other projects would inevitably come as many of these were service driven and wage inflation/NI increases would be likely to increase project costs.
 - The Exceat Bridge was subject to an ongoing planning permission on which the SDNPA had high expectations.
 - The Environmental Agency had a budget for shingle clearing and would be facilitating the management of the River Cuckmere from source to sea.
 - There had been challenges in getting all parties to sign the Memorandum of Understanding at Lullington Heath, but this was now completed and work would be beginning.
 - The project to deliver paperless meetings was started pre-Covid-19, but put on hold during the pandemic. A new way of delivering this was being explored and a phased roll out would begin from March 2022.
125. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note the content of the Performance Report and highlighted areas requiring further clarification or action.
126. The committee adjourned for a 5 minute comfort break.
127. Stephen Whale left the meeting

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ITEM 11: STANMER PARK RESTORATION PROJECT- END OF PROJECT REPORT

128. The Countryside and Policy Manager (Eastern Downs) introduced report PR21/22-22, highlighting that the project was led by Brighton and Hove City Council and played a short video to showcase the project successes and the elements funded by SDNPA.
129. The Committee commented that:
- Their congratulations were given on the success of the project.
130. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note the completion of the SDNPA funded elements of the Stanmer Park “Parks for People” Restoration Project.

ITEM 12: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

131. The Head of Governance and Support Services introduced report PR21/22-23 and highlighted that there had been one significant update to the risk register with regard to Risk 3 (Finance and Budgets) since it was last presented to the Committee. It was also highlighted that the Committee Chair and Deputies had met with the Independent (CIPFA) Co-opted Members to consider the risk register in detail and to give a higher profile to risk management in Committee. In future, invitations to such meetings would be extended to all members of the Committee.
132. A summary of the recent meeting with Committee Chair and Deputies and Co-opted Members, was given by the Deputy Chair, Tim Burr and Co-opted Member, Carole Nicholson to the Committee. It was highlighted that the 2 major risks facing the Authority were Risk 2 (Finance and Budgets) and Risk 25 (Government Response to the Landscape Review). It was reported that discussion was also focussed on Risk 1 (Health and Safety). It was also highlighted that it was important that the Committee considered the risk register before it considered the other governance items on the agenda.
133. The Committee commented that:
- The Authority must not spread itself too thinly as all budgets across all sectors were fully stretched.
134. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- Pre Application charging had slipped down the list of priorities as although it would bring in further revenue to the Authority the income that would be achieved was relatively small in comparison to the focus of Planning Performance Agreements.
 - Operational Management Team level Managers had all been involved in an exercise to look carefully at their areas of work and how this related to priorities. The process of realigning time and budget along with clearing the decks of other activities had been presented to the Senior Management Team, and would be presented to members at the upcoming budget workshop.
135. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note the Corporate Risk Register as at November 2021.
136. The Monitoring Officer withdrew from the meeting.

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ITEM 13: LEGAL SERVICES AND MONITORING OFFICER CONTRACTS – 2022 ONWARDS

137. The Head of Business Services introduced report PR21/22-24 and reminded Members of the report content.
138. The Chair advised the Committee that a member of the Committee was invited to join the panel to evaluate the tenders received and any member of the Committee that wished to do so to let the Chair know, if not the Chair would join the panel.
139. **RESOLVED: The Committee resolved to:**
1. Approve the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor or contractors to provide Legal Services and Monitoring Officer Services to SDNPA for a period of 3 years (and up to 5 with extensions) from 27 June 2022
 2. Approve delegation of Authority to the Chief Executive to award contracts for the above, following a competitive process carried out under the terms of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015
140. The Monitoring Officer returned to the meeting.

ITEM 14: WALLANDS SUDS IN SCHOOLS CONTRACT 2021-2022

141. The Landscape and Biodiversity Lead – Water introduced report PR21/22-25 reminded members of the report content and explained the SuDs in Schools project.
142. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
1. Approve the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor to deliver the Wallands SuDS in Schools project from February 2022.
 2. Approve delegation of authority to the Chief Executive to award contracts for the above, following a competitive process carried out under the terms of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

ITEM 15: DRAFT OPERATING AGREEMENT BETWEEN SDNPA AND SOUTH DOWNS COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS LIMITED

143. Tim Slaney withdrew from the meeting for the duration of Item 15.
144. The Head of Governance and Support Services introduced report PR21/22-26 and reminded members of the report content.
145. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The main risk that the Authority was taking on behalf of the trading company was public liability. The Authority was protecting itself because all employees were employed by the SDNPA and received the same Health and Safety training as well as being subject to completing the same risk assessments as those that did not work at the Seven Sisters Country Park.
 - Consideration of whether SDNPA should indemnify the company directors for all liabilities that they incur in respect of their delivery of the Landscape Management Plan would be re-examined before being presented to the NPA, as the Company directors had also raised a query about this provision.
 - The timetable outlined in Appendix 2 of the report was indicative and the Business Plan would be agreed annually by P&R and NPA.
 - The wording in the 'Permitted Activities at the Site', specifically related to applying for the Rural Payments Agency and similar grants was deliberate as it reflected the nature of the licence that would be issued to the Company to operate at the Seven Sisters Country Park.
 - South Downs Commercial Operations Limited currently had 4 Directors who were

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appointed by the NPA: Vanessa Rowlands, Stephen Whale, William Meyer and Tim Slaney. The Board of Directors also had the ability to appoint 2 independent directors themselves.

146. **RESOLVED:** The Committee Resolved to:

1. Note progress with the development of the Operating Agreement between SDNPA and South Downs Commercial Operations Limited (“the Company”);
2. Endorse, subject to any comments made by the committee the current draft of the Operating agreement, noting that work is ongoing to prepare the final version for approval by the NPA.
3. Endorse the principle of delegating matters related to the operation of the Operating Agreement to the Chief Executive as set out as paragraph 3.5 below.

ITEM 16: BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2021/22: MONTH 6

147. The Chief Finance Officer introduced report PR21/22-27 and reminded Members of the report contents.

148. Officers further commented that the Senior Management Team had more up to date information than was presented in the report and the current prediction was that there would be a larger underspend than that predicted in the presented report. The Authority was facing a time of rising core costs and flat cash settlements from Defra so any underspend would be used to prepare for future years.

149. The Committee commented that:

- It was right for the Authority to be prudent in terms of costs and unknown expenditure.

150. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

1. Note the 2021/22 revenue forecast position as at month 6 of a net (£22,000) below budget variance.
2. Note the 2021/22 capital forecast position as at month 6 of a zero budget variance subject to approval by the NPA of the capital variation set out in section 3.10 and Appendix 2.
3. Note the reserves position as at month 6.
4. Note the Treasury Management overview and position as at month 6.

ITEM 17: INTERNAL AUDIT - PROGRESS REPORT

151. The Internal Auditor introduced report PR21/22-28, reminded Members of the report contents and updated the Committee that the high priority action on Patch Management had now been implemented.

152. The Committee made the following comments:

- It was pertinent that a new report format and information had been developed for the Budget Monitoring Report.

153. In response to questions Officers clarified that:

- Capital works at the Seven Sisters’ Countryside Park were forecasted to complete on time during the 3rd week of March 2022, however it would take very little to delay this into the next financial year.
- SDNPA has a leaver process in place in that the HR team notify the appropriate people when a member of staff leaves the Authority. A systems check was then undertaken quarterly to provide an existence check. Further information would be circulated to

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the Committee on the overdue action of 'Accounts Payable/ Creditors'.

154. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note:

1. Progress against the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan (2021/22).
2. The implementation of audit actions previously agreed by management.

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 13.31