

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING

Held at 10.30am on 24 March 2022 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, Thérèse Evans, Barbara Holyome, Melanie Hunt, Doug Jones, Maggie Jones, Diana van der Klugt, Michael Lunn, Robert Mocatta, William Meyer, Russell Oppenheimer, Martin Osborne, Ian Phillips (Chair), 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:

James Winkworth (Head of Marketing and Income Generation), Jo Carr (Trustee of the South Downs National Park Trust) and Mike Hughes (Major Planning Projects and Performance Manager).

CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

152. The Chair of the Authority welcomed all present and informed them of general housekeeping matters.
153. 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.
154. The Chair informed that Agenda Items 15 and 16 were to note and 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

155. Apologies were received from Janet Duncton, Gary Marsh, Angus Dunn and William Meyer.

ITEM 2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

156. The following declarations were made:
 - Martin Osborne declared a public service interest in Agenda Item 12 as the Chair of the Aquafer Partnership and in Agenda Item 13 as a Brighton and Hove City Councillor.
 - Henry Potter declared a public service interest in Agenda Item 18 as a Chichester District Councillor and that he would withdraw from the meeting for this item.
 - Vanessa Rowlands and Stephen Whale declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 19 as Directors of the South Downs Trading Company and that they would withdraw from the meeting for this item.

ITEM 3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 16 DECEMBER 2022

157. The minutes of the Authority meeting held on 16 December 2022 were approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments:
 - Page 5, to correct that the meeting was not the Annual General Meeting of the SDNPA.

ITEM 4. MATTERS ARISING

158. There were none.

ITEM 5. URGENT ITEMS

159. There were none.

ITEM 6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

160. There was none.

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

161. Members were asked to consider the exclusion of the public, including the press, from the meeting for Agenda Items 17, 18 and 19.

162. The Monitoring Officer outlined the reasons for the consideration of this exclusion under paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, being information relating to the financial and business affairs of a particular person including the Authority and advised Members that, in each case, they must weigh the public interest in maintaining the exempt information against the public interest in disclosing the information. It was proposed that whilst there was a public interest in the transparency of Authority proceedings, Members needed to weigh this against the public interest in the National Park Authority being able to consider matters concerning its business and fully consider the implications of its actions or proposed actions particularly, in relation to agenda items 17 and 18, decisions which would have implications for the agreements regarding its ongoing delivery of its services, including its planning service, without the disclosure of information that could undermine its position or its ability to deliver value for money through these processes.

163. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to move into private session to consider Agenda Items 17, 18 and 19 and that the public, including the press, would be excluded from the meeting at the appropriate time.

ITEM 8. AUTHORITY CHAIR UPDATE

164. The Authority Chair introduced the report (NPA21/22-19) and gave updates on the following:

- Meetings of the Governance and the Shoreham Cement Works Area Action Plan Member Task and Finish Groups.
- A meeting with Transport for the South East (TfSE) at which the strategic transport plan for the South East was discussed.
- A meeting of National Parks England (NPE) which considered the body's draft response to the Government's Landscapes Review consultation.

165. Members made the following comments:

- The written explanation of the current situation related to Byways Open to All Traffic was much appreciated.
- Was any follow up to the meeting with Gillian Keegan planned?
- How did NPE's four delivery plans align with the SDNPA's three high level priorities?
- Had NPE taken a position on the reduction of NPA board sizes?

166. Members were advised:

- It was hoped there would be the opportunity to meet with Gillian Keegan again in the future. She was particularly interested in FIPL and new and innovative farming practices, also the SDNPA's Health and Wellbeing agenda.
- The delivery plans were developed at a national level representing all national parks, a significant number of which were upland national parks, but the delivery plans did not clash with the SDNPA's high level priorities.

- NPE's response to the Governance questions were still under discussion and no position had yet been agreed.

ITEM 9. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S PROGRESS REPORT

167. The Chief Executive introduced the report (NPA21/22-20) and gave updates on the following:
- That the SDNPA's budget settlement had not yet been confirmed, but a flat cash settlement was still expected.
 - New case studies had been recently released by NPE which highlighted what National Park Authorities had been doing since the release of the Landscapes Review in support of their four delivery plan areas.
 - The Nature Recovery Green Paper was released on 16 March 2022 which included details of the Government's plans on delivering 30by30 and consolidating levels of landscape protection and Defra's arm's length bodies. There was some unease about the terms consolidation and rationalisation being used around species protection.
 - Welcome to Lynne Govus as the new interim Head of Business Services and Joshua Esan as the new Engagement and Events Officer.
 - Great thanks to Alan Brough for his 10 years at the SDNPA as Head of Business Services.
168. Members made the following comments:
- Officers were commended for the successful Dark Skies Festival despite poor weather and the ongoing work on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.
 - Had there been any information on what budget settlements for future years could be?
 - Congratulations to the Income Generation Team on their excellent work.
 - It was excellent to see local volunteers and schools involved in the work funded by Trees for the Downs in Eastbourne.
 - It was important to ensure that, along with the improvement works at Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP), access to the site for disabled people was improved.
 - The entry signs project had been a great success. Was there any further work planned on SDNPA branding on parish signage and to encourage parishes to do this?
 - The Sustainable Communities Fund panel members, Design Review Panel members, and the Volunteer Ranger Service were thanked for their work.
 - The work of the Friends of the South Downs was also acknowledged in replacing stiles and gates with accessible alternatives.
169. Members were advised:
- There had been no particular information on future years' settlements, however, officers were pushing for a minimum of flat cash for the next 2 years.
 - Improving accessibility was key at SSCP including removing physical fencing to improve access across the site and disabled toilets and a changing places toilet would also be in place.
 - The work on parish signage was not given high priority over the pandemic, however, there were a number of pilot projects and parishes would be encouraged to use the shared identity on their signage. There has been no success so far in encouraging county councils to include the shared identity on replacement village signage.
170. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to note the progress made by the South Downs National Park Authority (the Authority) since the last report.

ITEM 10. SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK TRUST UPDATE

171. Jo Carr, Trustee of the South Downs National Park Trust (SDNPT) gave a verbal update on the work of the SDNPT, including the following highlights:

- Raising of over £2.5million for projects.
- The endowment for the Sustainable Communities Fund which had grown to over £400k.
- Continued return on investment for the Authority.
- Continuing growth despite the pandemic.
- Some of the key projects such as Beelines, Trees for the Downs, Hedgerows, and reNature (the Authority's Nature recovery campaign) .

172. Members made the following comments:

- Had a membership system been considered?
- Although events had been limited by the pandemic, were they seen as a promising source of income in the future?
- Was visitor giving being extended?
- Was the Corporate aspect of income from local or national companies? And did they prefer to be associated with a particular project or the trust in general?
- How does the trust work with other charities such as the National Trust or the RSPB?
- One area to explore could be with the local bus and train networks about the option to contribute when purchasing a ticket or rounding up.
- As the trust grew would the amount of SDNPA staff time seconded over to the trust increase?

173. Members were advised:

- The trust was not considering a membership system at the moment as there were a number of other charities offering similar memberships. The focus was more on encouraging regular givers and trailing new ideas for an increased return on investment.
- The trust was looking to hold similar events in the future to those that had contributed well in the past.
- Further opportunities were being explored including a project with the Brighton Biosphere.
- Both local, such as Jude's Ice Cream, and larger companies were involved and they preferred to support specific projects.
- Not having any land or key sites of our own had allowed the trust to work across sites throughout the SDNP and to work with other charities as delivery partners.
- As the Trust grew it may need to increase the amount of administrative support employed.

ITEM 11. SDNPA RESPONSE TO THE LANDSCAPE REVIEW CONSULTATION

174. The Chief Executive introduced the report (NPA21/22-21) and reminded Members of the content of the report.

175. The work of the Member Governance Task and Finish Group (GTFG) was also summarised.

176. Significant discussion was had by Members on the response including the following points:

- There was concern that not enough consideration had been given to the important role of locally elected Members in giving the SDNPA democratic legitimacy as a special purpose Local Authority. It was also commented that reducing board sizes in areas with a large number of Local Authorities may not be appropriate.

Agenda Item 3

- An Amendment (Amendment 1) was moved and seconded that significant changes should be made to the covering letter and consultation response.
- One solution would not fit all National Park Authorities; however, the Governance Task and Finish Group supported the point on reduced board sizes because along with our reduced resources and reduced staffing we should be seen to be willing to engage with this.
- It was suggested that the comments on nature recovery and climate change in the covering letter be moved to the front, as it was a significant regret this was left out of the Government's response.
- It would be good to be able to identify the skills needed for the Authority to operate effectively and to have more influence over the appointment practices of Local Authorities to meet those skills practices.
- All bodies promoting good governance practices recognised that limited terms of office for board members was good practice.
- When considering the SDNPA's response, national issues and what was right for National Parks as a whole should be borne in mind, rather than simply what was wanted in the South Downs. The response should be in the appropriate context, but not confused with the national response from NPE.
- The commitment to diversity in the covering letter was important.
- It should not be implied in the response that geographic location of Members directly impacted their engagement with the Authority.
- Following discussion the Amendment (Amendment 1) was revised to include a change to the covering letter and, under question 21, the ticks removed from against points 5 and 6 and the comment removed from under point 8.
- The Amendment (Amendment 1) was seconded, voted on and not agreed.
- It was felt the response should not be so negative toward possible new powers at questions 13 and 14. There were problems in areas of the South Downs along with other National Parks; having additional tools to deal with these issues would only be a good thing. An Amendment (Amendment 2) was moved and seconded to tick "yes" and remove the red text at question 14, and to tick all four bullet points and add to the red text at question 15 the wording "... especially for vulnerable users".
- Members should give serious consideration to the raised expectations of having additional powers, and how the Authority would not have the resources to implement or enforce them.
- The public perception of our response should also be considered.
- Following the discussion and vote the Amendment (Amendment 2) was agreed.
- It was suggested that wording of question 25, bullet 4 should be amended to read "Given the centrality of Net Zero to the Government's strategy, it is very disappointing to see no tangible mechanisms or levers *to achieve this* made available to Protected Landscapes". The Chief Executive undertook to make this change prior to submitting the response.
- Should reasons be given for the responses to questions 10 and 19?
- Could the response also refer to the need for a third statutory purpose to support our rural working landscape?
- The paragraphs in the response should be numbered to enable ease of reference.

177. Members were advised:

- Care must be taken when considering local democracy in relation to National Park Authorities as, while some Members were appointed and others elected by their Parish Councils, no Member was directly elected to the SDNPA.
- No reasons were given for the responses to questions 10 and 19 as they related specifically to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).
- Although the Glover Landscape Review proposed the current duty be enhanced to a third purpose, the Government has specifically ruled out that possibility.

178. The amended recommendations to include the amendments agreed at the meeting were proposed and seconded.

179. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to:

1. Approve, subject to the amendments agreed, the Authority's response to the Government's Landscape Review consultation and covering letter as set out at Appendix I.
2. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair of the Authority, to amend the response and covering letter in accordance with the discussion of the NPA and to submit the final consultation response and covering letter to Defra.

180. Peter Diplock left the meeting at 1.26pm.

ITEM 12. CORPORATE PLAN 2020-2025 YEAR 3 ACTION PLAN FOR 2022/23

181. The Director of Countryside Policy and Management introduced the report (NPA21/22-22) and reminded Members of the content of the report.

182. The Chair of Policy and Resources Committee summarised their scrutiny of the Corporate Plan at the last meeting of the committee.

183. Members made the following comments:

- Officers were thanked for the significant work that had gone into the Corporate Plan.
- It was important that officers and Members noted the need to remain focussed with the Authority's slimmed down resources. Also, the focus on equity and the measures around social media engagement were commendable. It was requested that Authority start using TikTok to engage a younger audience.
- On page 26, under "Effectively and efficiently process planning applications and appeals", point 1) should be clarified to detail what this actually means for people that do not know.
- On page 28, 7.7, this section should not be called "Major Developments"; perhaps renaming it "Major Projects" would be more appropriate.
- What audience was the Corporate Plan aimed at?
- What was the aim of the diagram on page 18?
- It was good to see the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) delivering our top priorities.
- There was some concern about how the wording, figures and donut diagram on page 20 could be interpreted
- It was good to see acknowledgement on page 6 that many people did not feel the National Park was for them. The ambition to increase diversity was very good.
- Could it be confirmed that the removal of internal fencing at SSCP to improve access did not also include the removal of hedging.
- Could the fact there are two projects, one called "Our South Downs" and another called "Your National Park" be confusing?

184. Members were advised:

- The Corporate Plan would mainly be a document for internal use, however, the Comms Team were also working on a one page summary of the Corporate Plan. It should also be highlighted whenever possible with ministers and officials in Defra.
- The diagram on page 18 was to show that both the Local Plan and Partnership Management Plan were delivering the National Park purposes and duty.
- It was acknowledged that some of the figures on page 20 could appear confusing, the donut diagram and supporting text would be reviewed and revised.
- The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) mission statement on page 7 was an important step to increasing the diversity of visitors.
- Hedgerows at SSCP were not being removed. Physical fencing was being removed and replaced with invisible fencing to go along with the new livestock that would be grazing the site.
- “Your National Park” was a general awareness campaign, whereas “Our South Downs” was the business network that was soon to be launched.

185. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to approve the Corporate Plan 2020-25 year 3 action plan 2022/23 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, subject to:

- a) any amendments required to address the comments made by the NPA
 - b) the final design of the Corporate Plan 2020-25 year 3 action plan for 2022/23, and
 - c) any minor text amendments considered appropriate,
- being approved by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair of the Authority.

186. Heather Baker left the meeting and Janet Duncton joined the meeting.

ITEM 13. REVENUE BUDGET 2022/23, CAPITAL STRATEGY 2022/23, TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022/23 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2022/23 TO 2026/27

187. The Chief Financial Officer introduced the report (NPA21/22-23), reminded Members of the content of the report, updated Members on the recommendation from Policy and Resources Committee and informed Members that under recommendation 2 the total of new capital projects should read £0.080m.

188. Members made the following comments:

- As the Authority may wish to draw down some of its reserves in the future, was there a view on what would be a minimum level of prudential reserves to hold?
- While there was a below budget variance, were there any risks the Authority should be aware of.
- Why was the Climate Change Action Fund reserve so low?
- Due to the impact of inflation the Authority should consider investing in bonds.
- If the Authority had projects ready to deliver it should consider allocating additional CIL to these rather than to third party projects which may not be ready to deliver immediately.
- Following the approval of the Corporate Plan it was notable the Authority did not have a Theme Programme Board (TPB) focussed on climate change.

189. Members were advised:

- A large amount of the reserves were already earmarked, for example, CIL. The remainder fell into two risk reserves, a working balance and a planning reserve. The planning reserve had already been reduced by £200k and, while drawing down some of

the reserve to fund projects may be appropriate in the short term, it would not be good practice to consider that a longer term solution.

- The forecasted underspend was beneficial in the short term as it meant some funds could be returned to reserves.
- The funds from the Climate Change reserve had been allocated to projects, however, the reserve could be replenished in the future should the Authority decide to allocate further funds to it.
- The Authority's investment strategy did enable bonds to be considered, however, bonds were currently very risky. Also, the Authority's strategy was focussed around liquidity and security and as bonds would not provide this they could not be recommended at this time. Due to its relatively small cash balances, the Authority did not have the flexibility to invest in the same way as larger Local Authorities.
- It was likely that inflation estimates in the Medium Term Financial Strategy would need to be amended and that would likely lead to a need to make staff and other savings.
- The Authority's climate change action plan was overarching across all the TPBs.

190. Maggie Jones left the meeting at 2.59pm.

191. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to:

1. Approve the Revenue Budget 2022/23 of £10.685m, including a contribution from General Reserves of £0.199m, as detailed in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.7 and Appendix 1.
2. Approve the Capital Strategy 2022/23, including new capital projects totalling £0.080m and capital variations of (£0.302m) recommended by Policy & Resources Committee, as detailed in paragraphs 3.8 to 3.11 and Appendix 2.
3. Approve the Treasury Management Strategy 2022/23 at Appendix 3 as recommended by Policy & Resources Committee.
4. Approve the planned use and creation of reserves as detailed in paragraph 3.25 and Appendix 4, and in particular, the establishment of a Trading Company Borrowing Reserve, for the purposes described in Appendix 4.
5. Note the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 to 2026/27 at Appendix 5.

ITEM 14. PROCESS FOR SELECTION AND RECOMMENDATION OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS TO THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

192. The Head of Governance and Support Services introduced the report (NPA21/22-24) and reminded Members of the content of the report.

193. Members made the following comments:

- Could the number of CIPFA members be clarified; were 2 or up to 2 being recruited?
- It would be good for the co-opted members to participate in the full range of Member meetings and activities, with the exception of the Authority meeting itself.
- In seeking a third co-opted member to P&R, was this person going to be from a land based background?
- Would a person from one of the large towns or cities surrounding the SDNP be considered for the role?

194. Members were advised:

- The recruitment exercise would be for up to 2 Independent (CIPFA) Co-opted members and that one of the current members could reapply.
- The third (non-CIPFA) co-opted member could be from any area, not necessarily only from a land based background, but they should complement the existing co-optees.
- Yes, the co-optees could be from one of the towns or cities surrounding the SDNP.

195. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to:

1. Appoint Morris Findley and Lawrence Leather to serve as non-voting Co-opted Members on the Policy and Resources Committee, until the Authority AGM in 2023
2. Note that the Director of Countryside Policy and Management, in consultation with the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee is currently undertaking a process to identify an additional co-opted member and make a recommendation for their appointment in due course.
3. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chairs of the Policy and Resources Committee, to undertake a recruitment exercise for the positions of 2 Independent (CIPFA) co-opted Member of the Authority's Policy and Resources Committee, including the approval of any documentation considered necessary and the taking of all other appropriate steps in carrying out the recruitment exercise and, if required, subsequent recruitment exercises; and
4. Delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chairs of the Policy and Resources Committee, to undertake such selection exercise(s) as the Chief Executive considers appropriate for the positions of Independent (CIPFA) Co-opted Member of the Authority's Policy and Resources Committee, and to make a recommendation to the Authority for the appointment of up to two Independent Members.

ITEM 15. PLANNING COMMITTEE MINUTES

196. Authority Members noted the minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held on 11 November 2021, 9 December 2021, 20 January 2022 and 10 February 2022.

ITEM 16. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES

197. Authority Members noted the minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meetings held on 30 September 2021 and 25 November 2021.

198. Doug Jones and Henry Potter left the meeting at 3.18pm.

199. Janet Duncton declared a public service interest in Agenda Item 18 as a Chichester District Councillor and she left the meeting at 3.18pm.

PART II EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

200. The meeting was closed to the public, including the press, and moved into private session at 3.18pm.

ITEM 17 PART II MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 16 DECEMBER 2021

201. The part II minutes of the Authority meeting held on 16 December 2021 were approved as a correct record.

ITEM 18. DELEGATED HOST AUTHORITY ARRANGEMENTS

202. The Major Planning Projects and Performance Manager introduced the report and reminded Members of the content of the report.

203. Members considered and discussed the matters before them.

204. Isobel Thurston left the meeting at 3.24pm.

205. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to:

1. Agree that, in principle, the South Downs National Park Authority enters into a new Agreement under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 with Chichester District Council to provide a quality development management service for a period of up to 4 years.
2. Delegate authority to the Director of Planning to negotiate, complete and sign the Agreement referred to in 1) above, subject to any substantial issues being referred back to the Authority for consideration.

206. Chris Dowling, Vanessa Rowlands and Stephen Whale left the meeting at 3.41pm.

ITEM 19. SOUTH DOWNS COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS LIMITED - SHAREHOLDER MATTERS

207. The Chief Executive introduced the report and reminded Members of the content of the report.

208. Members considered and discussed the matters before them.

209. **RESOLVED:** In its role as Shareholder of South Downs Commercial Operations Limited, the Authority::

1. Considered and commented upon the Company's draft Annual Business Plan (the Plan) set out in Appendix I;
2. Delegated authority to the Chief Executive to negotiate with the Directors of the Company any final amendments to the Plan arising from the Authority's comments or otherwise, taking account of any views expressed by the Chair of the Authority in regard to any amendments not previously considered by the Authority, and to agree the Plan on behalf of the SDNPA at the Company's Annual General Meeting (AGM);
3. Identified, as part of their discussion, additional issues to be raised with Company Directors at the Company's AGM.

210. The Chair closed the meeting at 4.18pm.

Signed _____