

## **SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

### **AUTHORITY MEETING**

Held at 10.30am on 19 May 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, Barbara Holyome, Doug Jones, Maggie Jones, William Meyer, Martin Osborne, Ian Phillips (Chair), Vanessa Rowlands, Andrew Shaxson, Isabel Thurston, 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), Lynne Govus (Interim Head of Business Services), Robin Parr (Head of Governance) and Richard Sandiford (Senior Governance Officer).

Also attended by:

Lucy Howard (Planning Policy Manager), Hannah Collier (Senior Planning Policy Officer), Katharine Stuart (Planning Policy Lead), and Andy Conlan (External Auditor).

### **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 Members that Agenda Item 16 was to note and this item was taken as noted as no Member indicated that they had any matters related to this item that they wished to discuss.

### **ITEM 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

155. Apologies were received from Chris Dowling, Angus Dunn, Therese Evans, Melanie Hunt, Diana van der Klugt, Michael Lunn, Gary Marsh, Robert Mocatta, Russell Oppenheimer, Henry Potter, and Richard Waring.

### **ITEM 2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

156. There were no declarations made.

### **ITEM 3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 24 MARCH 2022**

157. The minutes of the Authority meeting held on 24 March 2022 were approved as a correct record subject to the following amendment:
  - Minute 156 amended to read "Aquifer", not "Aquafer".

### **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 indicate if they wished to discuss any matters under Agenda Item 17, the Part II minutes of the National Park Authority (NPA) meeting held on 24 March 2022. As no Members indicated they wished to discuss any of these matters the Part II minutes of the NPA meeting held on 24 March 2022 would be approved as a correct record.

**ITEM 8. AUTHORITY CHAIR UPDATE**

162. The Authority Chair provided Members with a verbal update on the following matters:
- National Parks England's (NPE) approved their response to the Government's Landscape Review consultation. Although there were some differences of opinion from other NPAs, the NPE response was in broad alignment with the SDNPA response. There was general agreement on Governance matters, in particular, that there was no one size fits all solution and that the Authority Chair should not be appointed by the Secretary of State.
  - Meetings with Defra discussing governance matters. Assurance had been received that responses to the Landscape Review consultation from significant bodies would be given particular attention. In particular, the importance of local accountability, local representation, local connection, planning, and farming were emphasised.
  - Ongoing discussions between NPE, Natural England (NE), and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AoNBs) about a tripartite agreement.
  - The Broads Authority's departure from NPE.
  - The good work undertaken by the Governance and Shoreham Cement Works Area Action Plan Task and Finish Groups.
  - Recent and upcoming Member events, including Bereleigh Whole Estate Plan (WEP) visit, Brighton Downland WEP visit, and the Sustainable Solutions Member Day.
  - Meetings with the National Trust about the Cuckmere Estuary and the Heritage Coast.
  - A recent meeting with Transport for the South East where their strategic investment programme was outlined.
  - A meeting in April with the South Downs Partnership.
163. Members made the following comments:
- The discussions with Defra on governance matters were well received.

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

164. The Chief Executive introduced the report (NPA21/22-27), gave updates on the following, and highlighted a number of videos from the SDNPA's YouTube channel to Members.
- The Queens speech and some of the potentially relevant bills. It was disappointing that there was no obvious vehicle for the strengthening of the section 62 duty.
  - The recruitment of a new commercial director.
  - The launch of Our South Downs to support and develop the rural economy.
  - The levelling up bill and the removal of zoning.
165. Members made the following comments:
- Had there been any further developments on the issue of water neutrality?
  - It was important to keep the pressure on Defra to ensure the Landscapes Review was not forgotten about.
  - The SDNPA's youth action work and renaturing grants for schools were commended. Was there any way to pull microvolunteering data together?

- Recent feedback from a parish council meeting was that Defra's use of the term "Protected Landscapes" rather than National Parks and AONBs was not helpful.
- Would there be further Generation Green residentials in the future?
- Could the SDNPA do more to encourage water recycling?
- Could the SDNPA encourage the use of our education videos in schools? Also, could the Authority use these on TikTok?
- How likely was it that NPA budgets would increase over the next two years?
- The Income Generation Team were congratulated for their work.
- When would the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training dates be in Member's diaries?

166. Members were advised:

- A joint letter had been sent from the CEOs of the SDNPA and other responsible authorities to Defra and the Department of Levelling Up and Communities (DLUC). It was acknowledged a consistent approach to the issue was needed and all interested parties were waiting to hear from Natural England (NE) about a potential solution. Pressure was being kept up on NE and minister to find a solution to this matter.
- Thanks to the use of iNaturalist all the information gathered by volunteers was pulled together. The South Downs has been a significant source of iNaturalist reports.
- There were currently four government departments interested in funding Generation Green, so the outlook for more residentials in the future was good.
- Grey water recycling was already picked up in the SDNPA's Sustainable Construction Supplementary Planning Document and would also receive attention as part of the Local Plan Review.
- The Education Team already provide learning materials to schools which have been through the national curriculum and these include some of the SDNPA videos. TikTok was considered too labour intensive for the Authority to use.
- It was expected that NPA budgets would remain as flat cash settlements for the next two years.
- The EDI training dates had been circulated in the Member Bulletin and would be in Member's diaries shortly.

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

#### **ITEM 10. REPORT OF THE GOVERNANCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

168. The Head of Governance and Support Services introduced the report (NPA21/22-28) and members of the Governance Task & Finish Group commented on their considerations.

169. Members made the following comments:

- With the flat cash settlement and reduced staff resources, it was important to ensure Members were also doing their part to make savings. It would be interesting if a figure could be put on the savings made through these proposals.
- It was hoped that the reduced number of meetings would help to facilitate better attendance by Members.
- What was the process by which a committee could call an additional meeting?
- How would planning officers manage the possibility of a gap of 9 weeks between committee meetings?

170. Members were advised:

- Standing Order 8.7 currently set out the detail for calling an additional meeting. In practice, the committee would call an additional meeting if it collectively felt there was something it needed to discuss that could not wait until the next scheduled meeting.
- As the Planning Committee only considered the larger and more complex cases the number of these was limited and it was very common to require an extension of time on applications such as these, so the 9 week gap between committee meetings should not present an issue.

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

1. Endorse the outcomes of the work of the Task and Finish Group set out at Section 3.
2. Agree that the Policy and Resources Committee shall normally meet four times each year and that additional meetings may be called by the Committee or its Chair as required for the efficient dispatch of its business.
3. Agree that the Planning Committee shall normally meet nine times each year and that additional meetings may be called by the Committee or its Chair as required for the efficient dispatch of its business.
4. Agree the principle of proactively publishing information on each members attendance at formal meetings of the Authority and Committees on the Authority website.
5. Note the proposed 2022/23 schedule of Meetings of the Authority, Policy and resources Committee and Planning Committee set out at Appendix 1.

**ITEM 11. SHOREHAM CEMENT WORKS AREA ACTION PLAN ISSUES & OPTIONS FOR REGULATION 18 CONSULTATION**

172. The Planning Policy Manager introduced the report (NPA21/22-29) and gave updates on the comments from Planning Committee.

173. The Chair of Planning Committee commented on the committee's consideration of the Shoreham Cement Works (SCW) Area Action Plan (AAP) and emphasised what a unique opportunity this was to produce an exemplar sustainable development.

174. Members made the following comments:

- The Planning Policy Team were congratulated for their work on this.
- Had the traffic assessments taken account of the significant new developments nearby at Shoreham and the junction changes on the A27 at Lancing?
- Some of the evidence and thinking in the AAP was predicated on substantial investment in sustainable forms of transport, which may not be forthcoming. But also, with the shift to electrification, the carbon impact of transport should be lessened.
- Paragraph 2.3 states that "we have sought to engage with the landowner"; how much buy in to this is there from the landowner? Was there a danger that a significant amount of Authority time and effort was put into this project, but in the end the development did not proceed?
- How broad will the reach of the consultation be and how seriously will comments of those from further afield be taken?
- Given the significance and size of the site was there a danger that the Government may take an interest and intervene in the decision process?
- In the AAP, a number of designs were attributed to Oscar Faber, these needed to be checked to confirm their accuracy.
- It was important to ensure the right thing was done in the right way on this site and there was a significant opportunity for a range of uses on this site.

175. Members were advised:

- The new developments at Shoreham and the junction changes on the A27 had been factored into the evidence.
- There had been a certain level of engagement by the landowner, as evidenced by some of the evidence being gained on site and a site visit by the Member Task and Finish Group taking place. This plan aimed to explain our collective thinking about what should happen on this site and to give a level of certainty to the landowner and any other parties who may get involved with the site.
- The focus of the consultation exercise were locally based and with the local communities, but responses may be received from anyone anywhere and these would also be considered.
- As this was an AAP rather than an application there was no mechanism for the Government to intervene.

176. Andrew Shaxson left the meeting at 12.15pm.

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

1. Approve the draft Issues & Options version of the Shoreham Cement Works Area Action Plan (Appendix 1) for public consultation under Regulation 18 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 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 consultation being agreed by the Director of Planning in consultation with the Chair of the Authority.
2. Note the draft Sustainability Appraisal (SA) (Appendix 2) and draft Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) Screening Statement (Appendix 3) as supporting evidence for the draft Shoreham Cement Works Area Action Plan
3. Endorse the direction of the digital engagement as part of the public consultation exercise subject to any comments made by the Authority being addressed.

## **ITEM 12. LOCAL PLAN REVIEW AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME**

178. The Planning Policy Manager introduced the report (NPA21/22-30).

179. The Chair of Planning Committee commented on the committee's consideration of the Local Plan Review and Local Development Scheme.

180. Members made the following comments:

- It would be good if this Authority could lead the way on water recycling and rainwater harvesting.
- Officers should take an ambitious approach when reviewing policies.
- Would Members engage with the review through a Member Task and Finish Group or through workshops?
- It was important to remember the rural economy as part of this review and if there could be a more proportional approach to small scale developments that would be beneficial.
- What did it mean that a parish council had to be designated to start a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP)?
- How would the SDNPA be engaging with other local authorities, particularly host authorities, as part of this review.

181. Members were advised:

- There would be a number of Member Workshops held focussing on particular topic areas and open to all Members to attend. It would be particularly beneficial if Members were able to attend when allocations in their local area were being considered.

- If a parish council wished to produce an NDP they had to engage with the SDNPA and be designated as an area to produce an NDP.
- As there were no hosted arrangements with plan making, the SDNPA was the sole plan making authority for the SDNP. The SDNPA had Statements of Common Ground with all the relevant local authorities and they had a duty to cooperate. SDNPA Officers at all levels also regularly discussed plan making with their counterparts, not just at formally arranged meetings. It was important for parish and district councils to ensure they were taking note of the plans that were being developed by the SDNPA.

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

1. Note the purpose, resourcing and risks for the Local Plan Review and associated potential reviews of Neighbourhood Development Plans
2. Approve the commencement of the Local Plan Review
3. Approve the virement (budget transfer) of £227K from other Planning Policy budgets to the Development Plan budget in line with the Authority's financial procedures
4. Approve the Local Development Scheme (seventh revision) for the South Downs National Park set out in Appendix I of this report.

**ITEM 13. EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2021/22**

183. The External Auditor introduced the report (NPA21/22-31).

184. Members made the following comments:

- It was noted that the questions raised and directed to the Policy and Resources Committee would be important for the committee to reflect on at its future away day to ensure proper understanding of its oversight responsibilities.

185. **RESOLVED:** The Authority received and considered the External Audit Plan 2021/22.

**ITEM 14. INFORMING THE AUDIT RISK ASSESSMENT FOR THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY 2021/22**

186. The External Auditor introduced the report (NPA21/22-32).

187. Members made the following comments:

- Since the Authority took ownership of Seven Sisters Country Park there was a greater possibility of impairment of non-current assets.

188. Members were advised:

- The value of land and building was a significant risk and would be looked at more closely in a future audit.

189. **RESOLVED:** The Authority received and considered the responses in the attached paper Informing the audit risk assessment for South Downs National Park Authority 2021/22.

**ITEM 15. VALUE FOR MONEY – AUDITORS ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21**

190. The External Auditor introduced the report (NPA21/22-33).

191. Members made the following comments:

- Could it be clarified that contract procurement was separate from management.
- It was good to receive the reassurance that the Authority's treasury management arrangements with Brighton and Hove City Council represented good value for money.

192. Members were advised:

- Contract procurement was separate from contract management.

193. **RESOLVED:** The Authority received and considered the Value for Money – Auditor's Annual Report 2020/21.

**ITEM 16. PLANNING COMMITTEE MINUTES**

194. Authority Members noted the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 10 March 2022.

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

195. The part II minutes of the Authority meeting held on 24 March 2022 were approved as a correct record.
196. The Chair closed the meeting at 1.13pm.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

