

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**  
Date **5 July 2022**  
By **Chief Executive Officer**  
Title of Report **Chief Executive's Progress Report**  
**Note**

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**Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to note the progress made by the South Downs National Park Authority (the Authority) since the last report**

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**1. Summary and Background**

1.1 This report provides an overview of the work that has been underway since my report to the 19 May 2022 NPA.

**2. Introduction**

2.1 There was significant media coverage in June on the government response to the Henry Dimbleby report on the need for a National Food Strategy. Originally commissioned by Ministers before the start of the pandemic and published in two stages before and after the first wave, the report was widely praised when published in July 2021. It described the damage that what it calls the "Junk Food Cycle" is doing to our health, the planet and the livelihoods of those who produce our food. To begin to break this cycle it put forward fourteen wide-ranging recommendations. These include extending free school meals, using government procurement to drive food sustainability, creating a national land use framework, investing in the transformation of the food industry, trade reforms and radical use of farm payments to put soil health, carbon and biodiversity at the centre of food production.

2.2 The Government response focuses on home-grown food, including strengthening supply chains and boosting food production. £270 million will be invested in technology to increase productivity and profitability and the Government will consult on an ambition for 50% of public sector food spend to go on food produced locally or certified to higher standard. A framework will be published next year on how to help farmers grow more food while also meeting legally-binding targets to halt climate change and nature loss.

**3. Planning**

3.1 Planning performance continues to be good, with all Government targets met and a continuing strong record at appeal.

3.2 Members will recall National Highways' (NH's) proposals to upgrade the M3 Junction 9 to improve traffic flow on the M3 and A34. NH had scheduled the submission of their Development Consent Order (DCO) for this junction upgrade in early 2022. However, the Government have asked them to pause smart motorway projects and this includes the proposed smart motorway on the M3 between Junctions 9 and 14. Due to the potential

implications of the smart motorway on the junction upgrade the DCO submission is now expected to be submitted early in 2023.

#### 4. Progress of Existing Projects

- 4.1 The public consultation on the Issues & Options version of the **Shoreham Cement Works Area Action Plan (AAP)** started on 7 June and runs for eight weeks until 2 August. We ran two well attended in person events at Upper Beeding with the Parish Council and in Shoreham by Sea with the Shoreham Society. There will also be two virtual events at the beginning of July. We have had positive feedback on the videos and the virtual consultation.
- 4.2 **Landscape Recovery Scheme pilot:** two bids were submitted for the 24 May Defra deadline from within the SDNP. Lapwings and Landscapes: Nature Recovery in the Arun Valley is a consortium of 17+ landowners from Pulborough down to the sea at Climping covering approx. 2200ha. The bid aims to create a mosaic of wetland habitats to provide a bigger, better and more joined up habitat for lapwings and other species. The Trust and SDNPA have facilitated this bid and produced the application on behalf of the partnership of landowners/managers. In addition, the Adur Landscape Recovery Project, led by the Knepp Wildland Foundation, aims to connect land to sea with a collaborative approach to revitalising and restoring the River Adur as a corridor of riparian life. This bid is 766ha and has a partnership of 27 landowners. Both bids are part of the wider Weald to Waves concept which has an aspiration of connecting Ashdown Forest to the sea. Interest in the pilot scheme has been high with 51 bids submitted from across England. The outcome of the bids is expected to be announced by Defra in July and only 15 projects will proceed.
- 4.3 **Call for Nature Sites (C4NS):** From the 77 EOIs received under the call for nature sites (approx. 4800ha), 59 have now been classified as either green or amber and are to be taken forward. The rest either did not meet our criteria or were ruled out as existing core nature or outside the National Park. The green/amber initiatives are now with Area Teams and Strategy Leads to make contact with the various applicants to agree action plans.
- 4.4 The South Downs National Park Trust is considering six **C4NS** submissions in the current funding round for Beelines and a number of sites have been put forward for Trees for the Downs 2022-23. Other sites will be scheduled for subsequent funding rounds after discussion with the Area Teams.
- 4.5 Between five and ten projects will be developed with Area Teams and Strategy Leads to pilot **ReNature grant funding**. Decisions on these cases will be made in the autumn, for delivery on site from spring 2023.
- 4.6 As showcased on the recent Green finance Member visit, the development of a '**green financing**' model with Palladium through NPE and Revere continues. This includes the pilot study and business plan of Renaturing 450 acres of Broadreed Farm. LEP funding of £65k has also been secured to develop further Renaturing for estates and farms.
- 4.7 Following the NPAs adoption of a vision for the National Park's rural economy in April 2021 **Our South Downs** was launched by SDNPA on 19 May, This is a Business Community Network with a mission statement to "promote stronger, shorter rural supply chains and support businesses in their pursuit of sustainability". The aim is to build a community of like-minded micro and small businesses, who share the same values around sustainability, into a local network group to promote stronger and shorter rural supply chains and support them in their pursuit for sustainability. The initiative has attracted 85 business members and nearly 700 enterprise newsletter subscribers in the first month.
- 4.8 During Q3 this year Our South Downs will host Green South Downs, the sustainability accreditation programme for businesses, which provides the opportunity for SDNPA, through its Partnership with Green Tourism, to support, track and celebrate businesses on their journey to Net Zero and greater sustainability. When operational Green South Downs will represent the first accredited sustainability programme delivered by an NPA.
- 4.9 15 July is the **50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the South Downs Way**. We will be marking the occasion with a commemorative plaque to go on a SDW marker in each of the parishes through which

the SDW passes and a celebratory plaque to mark Buriton's special place as the start/end of the SDW for over 20 years.

- 4.10 We will launch the anniversary year with a press release and with two events. The focus will very much be on the next 50 years. We are in discussions with Buriton to lead a nature spotting walk with the community. Then the following day, on 16 July, we will kick off the ReNature Festival with “**South Downs Way at 50: A Way into the Downs**”. This will include a physical guided walk led by the SDW Team with Youth Ambassadors which will encourage nature surveying along the way using iNaturalist. We will be looking for other opportunities to work with communities and businesses throughout the anniversary year.

## 5. **Volunteers and Delivery**

- 5.1 All **Volunteer Ranger Service (VRS)** groups and individual volunteering programmes are now running across the SDNP following the lifting of Covid restrictions. The first face-to-face VRS AGM since 2019 was held at the South Downs Centre on Saturday 28 May. In the first part of Q1 2022-23, 108 VRS volunteers contributed 739 hours for the National Park. Volunteer recruitment is taking place across the SDNP areas and a new online volunteer registration process has been developed to encourage a wider range of people to apply. Recruitment is also underway for Visitor Welcome volunteer roles at Seven Sisters Country Park, with further roles being recruited later this year.
- 5.2 **SDNPA Volunteer Review:** A review of SDNPA supported volunteering is currently underway facilitated by Heritage Insider. The review, which is taking place between May and September, will lead to an action plan to guide the next 5 years of volunteering across the National Park. It will include all volunteering supported by the SDNP including the VRS, South Downs Youth Action, microvolunteering, project volunteering and volunteering at Seven Sisters Country Park. The review will be guided by input from staff, volunteers and partner organisations and will draw on best practice from the wider National Park family and other organisations. All current volunteers have been invited to contribute their views through an online survey.
- 5.3 **South Downs Youth Action (SDYA):** The SDYA programme for 2022-23 is being promoted through a range of channels. Three SDYA days have been held so far this quarter including a wildlife survey at Amberley Museum, flint-walling at Stanmer Park and a wildlife survey at the Weald and Downland Museum. We have also supported Youth Action Fund activity for the Rural Refugee Network at the Sustainability Centre.
- 5.4 **Microvolunteering:** The Brighton and Eastern Downs Region performed very well in this year's City Nature Challenge. 175 observers participated logging over 7,000 species. Out of all the UK regions taking part we came 1st for species, 3rd for number of participants, and 4th for number of observations.
- ## 6. **Corporate Update**
- 6.1 We officially launched the new facilities at **Seven Sisters Country Park** on 16 June (Sussex Day). The opening received extensive coverage in the local press including, ITV Meridian, BBC Radio Sussex and the local papers. The Grab and Go opened in late May and is proving popular selling a selection of locally produced, high quality food and beverage. The chalk grassland is awash with flowers and in the coming weeks the team will begin monitoring the effects of winter grazing.
- 6.2 On 20 June at the Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts at Sussex University there was the premiere of four new **songs inspired by the South Downs**. The event included Sam Moore's film and accompanying music by Ed Hughes, which SDNPA commissioned to mark the 10th anniversary of the National Park. It also launched a free digital resource pack for educators to inspire young people to compose in response to the landscape and culture of the National Park. This includes interviews with the composers, tips on how to get started with composing, and a bespoke library of sampled sounds from the South Downs specially prepared for use with digital audio software. It is pleasing that our 10th anniversary has inspired such an outpouring of creativity by local schools and established composers.

- 6.3 SDNPA have been leading walks for participants who access **MIND** in West Sussex. These walks have helped with breaking down barriers to adults with mental health issues to access National Park.
- 6.4 SDNPA partnered with **Creative Waves**, a community based Arts organisation, to deliver a project to adults experiencing isolation and loneliness and physical and mental health issues. This ran from January to April 2022 and supported up to 40 underserved adults in West Sussex. Participants were referred through social prescribing, MIND and social media channels.
- 6.5 We have also been working alongside the **National Academy of Social Prescribing** South East. We have presented to the network alongside Natural England and the Wildlife Trust promoting Health and Well-Being and the importance of access to green spaces using green social prescribing.

## 7. Media and Communications

- 7.1 This has been a busy time for our **digital work**, with our social media followers now over 67,000, up from 59,000 this time last year. In May and June, just under 250,000 unique visitors visited our website. Top pages included the Shoreham Cement Works Area Action Plan (over 7,000 visitors) and our walking trails page which received over 8000 visitors.
- 7.2 To celebrate the **Queen's Platinum Jubilee**, over 12,000 trees have been planted in the National Park as part of the Trees for the Downs campaign and all of them have been dedicated to Her Majesty for the Queen's Green Canopy. Each tree will support the National Park's nature recovery drive. The planting includes iconic species such as black poplar, oak, field maple and disease-resistant elms. The announcement of this initiative garnered over 170 pieces of media coverage across the UK, including Daily Mail, Evening Standard and Independent.
- 7.3 The launch of Seven Sisters and the new visitor centre for Sussex Day has been the big story in this quarter, with coverage by BBC Sussex and ITV Meridian, as well as glowing reports in the *Brighton Argus*, *Sussex Express* and *Eastbourne Herald*. We also hosted a press trip for French journalists and are hoping for good coverage in *Le Monde*.

## 8. Conclusion

- 8.1 As with previous reports, my aim has been to provide an overview of the highlights of the busy period since my report to the 19 May NPA, leaving Members to follow up any issues on which they would like more detail or would like to discuss further at the Meeting.

## TREVOR BEATTIE

### Chief Executive Officer

### South Downs National Park Authority

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| Appendices           | None  |
| SDNPA Consultees     | Chief Executive; Director of Countryside Policy and Management; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services, Business Service Manager |
| External Consultees  | None  |
| Background Documents | N/A   |