

Report to **South Dows National Park Authority**
Date **20 October 2022**
By **Communications & Engagement Manager**
Title of Report **Review of Public Affairs Strategy**
Decision

Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to approve the draft Public Affairs Strategy 2022-24 as set out in Appendix I.

I. Introduction

- I.1 In December 2017, the National Park Authority agreed its first Public Affairs Strategy. An interim review was carried out in 2019 and the strategy was fully reviewed in 2020.
- I.2 In 2020, it was agreed that the strategy would be reviewed in 2022 to assess how the Authority had done against the set objectives and to identify whether the objectives set in 2020 were still relevant given the fast-changing policy environment.
- I.3 In July 2022, a paper was brought before the P&R Committee which set out how the Authority had done against the existing objectives and identified priority areas and objectives going forward. The P&R Committee agreed to recommend the draft Public Affairs Strategy to the Authority for approval.
- I.4 A draft Public Affairs Strategy 2022-24 which has been updated to incorporate the feedback from the P&R Committee can be found in full at Appendix I.
- I.5 In determining what to choose as the Authority's public affairs objectives it is important to remember that these are the issues that the Authority determinenez can most be influenced by public affairs work (i.e. influencing policy, practice and opinion) and is not an indication of the prominence of these issues over others. Each objective must pass three crucial tests as agreed by Members:
- Do we have a clear leadership role to play?
 - Do we have a genuine ability to influence?
 - Is the issue time critical?
- I.6 The public affairs objectives do not indicate organisational or delivery priorities, which are set in the Corporate Plan nor wider Communications & Engagement priorities which have been set in the Communications & Engagement Strategy.
- I.7 It is also important to say that public affairs work takes time and, if the 2022-24 Strategy is approved, the Authority must be mindful that only two topics have been chosen with a small number of targeted objectives to pursue rather than attempting to cover everything and achieving less.
- I.8 This paper has been developed with input and expertise from across the organisation. A key step in determining how the Authority has done has been to gather together the public

affairs work carried out at all levels of the organisation. Officers are grateful to Members who have fed in to the collation of this information.

2. Aims of the Public Affairs Strategy

2.1 The Public Affairs Strategy for the SDNPA has three key purposes. To:

- ensure a coordinated and targeted approach to our public affairs work to enable the Authority to influence policy and decision making on agreed strategic issues affecting the National Park;
- identify the key public affairs issues that we will proactively work on over the next two years; and
- set out guiding principles for how we can effectively and quickly deal with emerging issues so that the Authority can respond to challenges and be ready to grasp opportunities.

3. Reviewing the current Public Affairs Strategy

3.1 The current Public Affairs Strategy objectives were grouped under the three priority areas of Future of Farming; Engaging Young People with Nature and Nature Recovery.

3.2 P&R Committee reviewed what the Authority set out to achieve and how it had done against each of these objectives. The current priorities were then reviewed to identify if they were issues where we could continue to create change in policy, practice and opinion through our public affairs work.

4. Key Issues

4.1 At its meeting in July 2022, P&R Committee agreed with the two priority issues, as set out in the draft Public Affairs Strategy 2022-24, that would provide the strongest potential for positive change through targeted public affairs work over the next two years and recommended that Public Affairs Strategy 2022-14 be approved by the NPA.

4.2 During the discussion at P&R Committee, Members focused on two key matters:

- Whether nature and climate should be separated as issues. It was agreed that within the context of the National Park that the issue of nature and climate change are so interdependent that they should remain as one issue. The wording of the draft strategy has therefore been amended to better show connectivity between these issues.
- Whether National Park for All may be confused with Open Access. Members were reassured that the two were very different and that National Park for All is about providing opportunity to enjoy the National Park for everyone. The text was revised with input from Members to ensure this differentiation is clear.

4.3 These key issues are set out in full detail in the attached revised Public Affairs Strategy (**Appendix I**) but are set out in summary below.

4.4 Nature and Climate

4.4.1 Why this issue?

Nature is increasingly under pressure, and we urgently need to reverse its decline. At present, just 25% of the National Park is managed for nature, and the National Park Authority has therefore adopted an ambitious target to increase this to 33% by renaturing 13,000 hectares of land by 2030. Nature also holds the key to successfully responding to climate change. Biodiversity loss and climate change do not recognise administrative boundaries. A regional response to biodiversity loss and climate change is needed if we are to ensure nature everywhere, for everyone, and to provide nature-based solutions to climate changes that the National Park and the wider South East is already experiencing. We want the National Park to sit at the heart of nature recovery and climate action in the region. National Parks also sit at the heart of the nation's nature recovery network and climate vision and we will work as part of the wider National Park family to support and

deliver on the nation's ambitious nature recovery targets and to achieve rapid action towards net zero in National Parks.

4.4.2 Objectives

- All local authorities in the SDNP to sign up to Race to Zero to ensure a common framework to work collectively towards net zero.
- All local authorities in the SDNP to manage their assets to work towards 33% of land managed for nature by 2030
- Ensure the three Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) covering the National Park are fit for purpose for the National Park.
- All local authorities in the SDNP to work in partnership with the SDNPA to deliver nature recovery through the planning system using all available mechanisms including biodiversity net gain.
- SDNPA to develop a campaign to enable everyone to play their part in climate action.

4.5 National Park for All

4.5.1 Why this issue?

National Parks were created for everyone and are key to supporting the nation's health and wellbeing as well as conserving and enhancing the area. We want the South Downs to be a welcoming and accessible place where everyone can not only experience and enjoy the National Park, but can actively play a role in helping to care for its future. National Parks were created for everyone and are key to supporting the nation's health and wellbeing. For many, huge barriers remain to accessing the National Park that go beyond physical accessibility barriers. The Glover Review found that "many communities in modern Britain feel that these landscapes hold no relevance for them."

4.5.2 Objectives

- The SDNPA, authorities, parishes and communities in the National Park to actively manage their greenspaces to:
 - improve access opportunities for everyone;
 - provide greater opportunity for connection to nature;
 - enable everyone to better discover and enjoy the National Park.
- Authorities and parishes to ensure their urban green spaces link into the National Park to provide opportunities for nature recovery, access and health and wellbeing.
- All local authorities in the SDNP to use all mechanisms, including Community infrastructure Levy (CIL), to deliver better access and opportunities for connection with nature for everyone.
- The SDNPA to use its ReNature campaign to raise awareness of the need for nature recovery and to enable everyone to play their part.

5. **Delivery – a shared responsibility**

5.1 Delivering Public Affairs is a shared endeavour between staff, senior management and Members, who must all play their part in influencing at their respective levels in a targeted and planned manner. The objectives chosen for the revised Public Affairs Strategy are designed to enable everyone to play a role. For example, local authority and parish nominated Members can play a key role in influencing their relevant bodies in how they manage their greenspace.

6. **Next steps**

6.1 The Strategy will be delivered through the direct and proactive work of Members and officers.

- 6.2 A short guide with key objectives and messages will be produced to support this proactive work by Members and officers.
- 6.3 A concise annual delivery plan will be developed and overseen by SMT.
- 6.4 The specific impact of individual public affairs activities is notoriously difficult to measure as it can be, at times, impossible to attribute a change in behaviour, policy or practice to one particular activity. Objectives have therefore been chosen where success can be more clearly identified. Data will be gathered biannually from Members and relevant officers to ensure the Authority is working towards achieving its objectives.

7. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	The strategy will be delivered within existing resources.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Effective strategies ensure targeted use of the funds allocated for this work.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	This strategy delivers on all three key areas of the Corporate Plan – nature recovery, climate change and national park for all. It delivers on Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 of the PMP
Links to other projects or partner organisations	Communications & Engagement Strategy.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	The Public Affairs Strategy directly addresses our climate change objectives through its focus on delivering the nature and climate objectives.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	N/A
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	The Strategy seeks to remove or minimise disadvantages experienced by certain groups in accessing and enjoying the National Park. By focusing on the accessibility and biodiversity of public greenspace, it encourages the use of such space by groups currently facing barriers in doing so.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	No
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	No
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	No

Implication	Yes*/No
Are there any Data Protection implications?	No
Are there any Sustainability implications based on the 5 principles set out in the SDNPA Sustainability Strategy?	The strategy contributes to the delivery of principles 1, 2 and 5 of the Sustainability Strategy.

8. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
There is a risk that the Authority does not have mechanisms to identify and respond to emerging issues.	Low	Medium	The Public Affairs Strategy mitigates this risk.

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Appendices I. Draft Public Affairs Strategy 2022-24

SDNPA Consultees Chief Executive; Director of Countryside Policy and Management; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer.

External Consultees None

Background Documents [SDNP Public Affairs Strategy 2020](#)

Draft South Downs National Park
Authority
**Public Affairs Strategy
2022-24**



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Introduction

The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) Public Affairs Strategy is designed to enable the Authority to make decisions about when and where we need to act to influence policy, practice or opinion on key issues in order to fulfill our statutory purposes and duty, and to protect the special qualities of the National Park.

This updated Public Affairs Strategy (2022-24) has three key purposes:

- to ensure a coordinated and targeted approach to our public affairs work to enable the Authority to influence policy and decision making on agreed strategic issues affecting the National Park;
- to identify the key public affairs issues that we will proactively work on over the next two years; and
- to set out guiding principles for how we can effectively and quickly deal with emerging issues so that the Authority can respond to challenges and be ready to grasp opportunities.

It is **one** of, but by no means the only, key way by which we can achieve the large-scale objectives of the *Partnership Management Plan*, the *Local Plan* and the *Corporate Plan* that sit outside of our direct control.

This Strategy has clear links to a number of key strategic organisational documents and strategies (see Figure 1 below). It does not duplicate the objectives set out in any of them.

The Strategy is for 2022-24 and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis by SMT to ensure that emerging issues and a changing external policy environment are adequately reflected.

Figure 1: Context of the Public Affairs Strategy



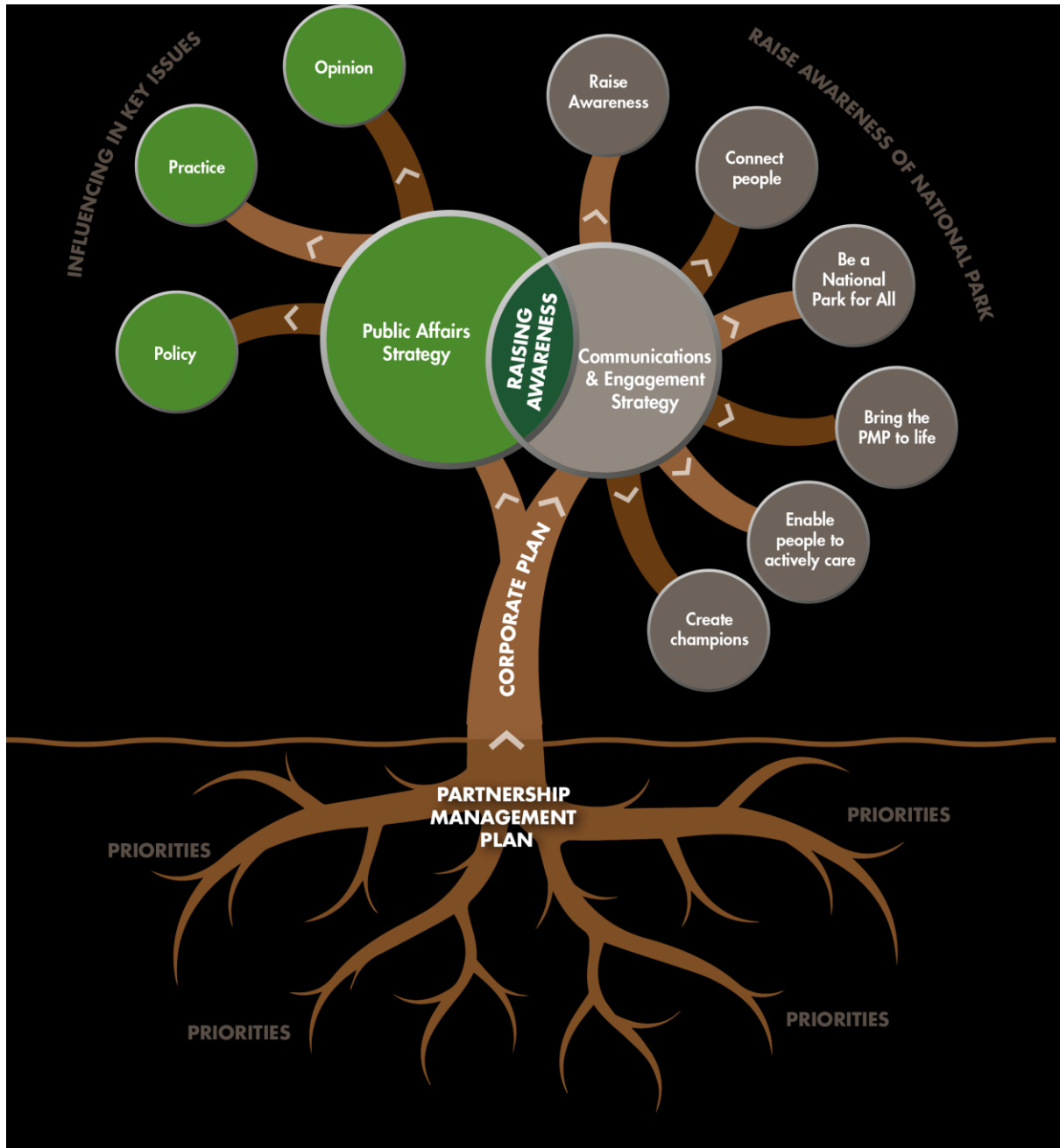
How our communications and engagement, and public affairs works together

Public affairs is only one aspect of our wider communications and engagement work. The Public Affairs Strategy sits alongside the Communications & Engagement Strategy but unlike the Communications & Engagement Strategy it:

- does not cover the day-to-day detailed communications about the projects and wider work of the National Park and our partners;
- it is not about ongoing communication with stakeholders which is covered elsewhere; and
- it is also not the sole expression of our corporate or budget priorities.

See Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Public Affairs Strategy and Communications & Engagement



Guiding principles

This strategy sets out the strategic issues that our public affairs work will focus on in the coming two years. To choose which issues to prioritise for our public affairs work, we have used the guiding principles set out below. Things can and do change quickly and we need to be able to respond in an agile and swift manner. These guiding principles will also be used to decide on whether any emergency or urgent issues should be of high priority.

We prioritise issues:

- that play a major role in the delivery of the Purposes for which the National Park has been designated and the duty of the Authority;
- that deliver on our Corporate Plan priorities;
- where the special qualities of the South Downs are at risk;
- that directly relate to the priorities set out in the Government's plans for National Parks, including the issues raised in the Landscape Review;
- that are likely to generate significant interest and concern among the communities of the National Park; and
- that are likely to generate significant media interest; and

We will then vet each of these issues against three crucial tests:

- where we have a clear leadership role to play;
- where there is genuine ability for us to influence; and
- where the issue is time critical – ie, when there is a specific policy debate/practical development that means the window of opportunity to influence is now.

Key issues and objectives

The Partnership Management Plan (PMP) sets out the key outcomes for the National Park over the next five years, while our Corporate Plan sets out the priorities for the National Park Authority until 2025. Our Communications & Engagement Strategy supports delivery of the PMP and covers all of the key outcomes, as well as our Local Plan and Corporate Plan. This Public Affairs Strategy focuses on the key issues that can best be influenced by public affairs work – **ie where we can influence policy, practice or opinion**. The issues included are no reflection of the relative importance of these issues over other issues in the PMP or Corporate Plan.

To ensure adequate focus and resources, a small and targeted number of key issues have been chosen to focus our public affairs work on. The following issues represent the key challenges and opportunities facing the National Park.

Our public affairs work to influence policy, practice and opinion on our chosen issues below, will continue at a high level individually through direct liaison in policy development fora and as part of the wider NPE and NPUK family. At a regional and local level we will ensure that we develop and create relationships at all levels to enable delivery of our public affairs objectives.

The strategy will be reviewed and its delivery overseen by the Senior Management Team to ensure that emerging issues and a changing external policy environment are adequately reflected.

NATURE AND CLIMATE

Nature is increasingly under pressure, and we urgently need to reverse its decline. At present, just 25% of the National Park is managed for nature, and the National Park Authority has therefore adopted an ambitious target to increase this to 33% by renaturing 13,000 hectares of land by 2030. Nature also holds the key to successfully responding to climate change. Biodiversity loss and climate change do not recognise administrative boundaries. A regional response to biodiversity loss and climate change is needed if we are to ensure nature everywhere, for everyone, and to provide nature-based solutions to climate changes that the National Park and the wider South East is already experiencing.

Despite nature recovery and climate finally reaching top level priority in Government planning over the last year or two as we headed towards COP26, the cost of living crisis has seen priorities change and commitments to both nature recovery and climate change begin to waver.

Climate change is one of the key factors negatively impacting on our natural world. In turn, nature has a key role to play in combating climate change. Nature-based solutions provide the basis of the National Park Authority's response to climate change. We want the National Park to sit at the heart of nature recovery and climate action in the region.

National Parks also sit at the heart of the nation's nature recovery network and climate vision and we will work as part of the wider National Park family to support and deliver on the nation's ambitious nature recovery targets and to achieve rapid action towards net zero in National Parks.

WHY THIS ISSUE?

Key role to play:

Purpose 1 of National Parks is to Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area. Biodiversity loss and climate change are inextricably linked and are key to the future of the National Park.

Our Ability to influence:

We have an ability to influence at local, regional and national level:

- As part of the protected landscapes family, which forms a key element of the Government's NRN Strategy. At a local and regional level we have the partner relationships to bring key stakeholders from across the region to work together towards nature recovery.
- As part of the National Park family we have committed to work together, at scale, to achieve rapid action towards net zero in National Parks through Race to Zero. We are well placed to influence the adoption of Race to Zero as a common framework for National Parks and local authorities.

Time critical: Nature is in trouble and action is needed fast if the Government is to meet its NRN target to restore 75% of protected sites to favourable condition and to achieve 30 by 2030 so that nature can thrive.

- The Local Nature Recovery Strategy guidance is currently being developed.
- There are strong calls for a consistent measure and framework for climate action – now is the time to push for shared commitment to using Race to Zero as a common framework.

OUR OBJECTIVES:

- All local authorities in in the SDNP to sign up to Race to Zero to ensure a common framework to work collectively towards net zero.

- All local authorities to manage their assets to work towards 33% of land managed for nature by 2030
- Ensure the three Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) covering the National Park are fit for purpose for the National Park.
- All local authorities to work in partnership with the SDNPA to deliver nature recovery through the planning system using all available mechanisms including biodiversity net gain.
- SDNP to develop a campaign to enable everyone to play their part in climate action.

Barriers:

- Lack of clarity about what the LNRS guidance will contain.
- Lack of a shared framework and consistent measuring, planning and delivery.
- Heavy planning pressures especially on the coastal plain.

NATIONAL PARK FOR ALL

What is the issue?

National Parks were created for everyone and are key to support the nation’s health and wellbeing. We want the South Downs to be a welcoming and accessible place where everyone can not only experience and enjoy the National Park, but can actively play a role in helping to care for its future.

For many, huge barriers remain to accessing the National Park that go beyond physical accessibility barriers. The Glover Review found that “many communities in modern Britain feel that these landscapes hold no relevance for them.”

As part of National Parks England we have committed to work towards the following collective goal, “Everyone should be able to discover and engage with protected landscapes to benefit the health and wellbeing of the whole nation”.

WHY THIS ISSUE?

Key role to play:

Purpose 2 of National Parks is to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public. The SDNPA has created strong networks across learning, youth action, access, health and wellbeing, volunteering and cultural heritage.

Our Ability to influence:

The SDNPA is well placed to influence at local/regional and national level as part of NPE and the wider NPUK family.

Time critical:

Covid has had a big impact on many of our most underserved communities including young people and those with health and wellbeing issues. The pandemic has, however, created a unique moment where many people have experienced a first time connection with nature by visiting the South Downs. We need to jump on this opportunity to help connect our underserved communities with the benefit of their National Park and nature.

OUR OBJECTIVES:

- The SDNP, authorities, parishes and communities in the National Park to actively manage their greenspaces:
 - to improve access opportunities for everyone;
 - to provide greater opportunity for connection to nature;
 - to enable everyone to better discover and enjoy the National Park.
- Authorities and parishes to ensure their urban green spaces link into the National Park to provide opportunities for nature recovery, access and health and wellbeing.
- All local authorities to use all mechanisms, including Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), to deliver better access and opportunities for connection with nature for everyone.
- The SDNPA to use its ReNature campaign to raise awareness of the need for nature recovery and to enable everyone to play their part.

Barriers:

- Lack of awareness of what the National Park is and what it has to offer.
- Access or financial issues
- Lack of employment opportunities, work-related learning, volunteering roles and awareness of what the SDNP can offer
- Social, cultural and economic divisions that have left some feeling that National Parks are not spaces in which they can find welcome or belonging. This includes a lack of representation of the breadth of society.

How we will deliver

Our greatest strength as an Authority is the knowledge and passion of our people. This Public Affairs Strategy will only be achieved through the coordinated and joint efforts of officers and members. SMT will oversee delivery on an annual delivery plan for our public affairs work.

Key stakeholders

The SDNPA cannot create change on key issues for the National Park on its own. The PMP brings together the key stakeholders to identify the objectives that we collectively want to achieve and makes a commitment to working in partnership through a shared delivery plan.

Every kind of stakeholder needs coordinated relationship management and communication, ranging from an occasional 'light touch' to detailed, frequent updates.

The SDNPA manages its relationships with key stakeholders in two ways:

- on an ongoing basis; and
- on specific issues at specific times.

This stakeholder management is led by relevant strategy leads, Heads of Team, SMT and Members.

Successful engagement on specific issues relies on relationships built up with the stakeholder on an ongoing basis. Keeping the right people informed at the right time, with the right amount of detail is

critical to making stakeholders feel valued, involved, and heard and to ensuring that when important issues arise, relationships management is ongoing and a level of communication is already in place.

Identifying the key stakeholders for each issue has been done by applying four criteria:

1. **Contribution (value):** Does the stakeholder have information expertise on the issue that could be helpful?
2. **Influence:** How much influence does the stakeholder have and who with?
3. **Willingness to engage:** How willing is the stakeholder to engage?
4. **Necessity of involvement:** Is this someone who could derail or delegitimise the process if they were not included in the engagement?

Channels: We have many communications and engagement channels that we can use in pursuit of our public affairs objectives. We will look at the best channels to use to connect with/influence them. It is most likely that we will use a combination of different channels for each stakeholder. Our communication channels include, among others:

- Leadership channels:
 - High-level meetings with Defra and other Government departments and bodies
 - High-level meetings between leaders/chairs
 - Member interactions with their own bodies, local authorities, parishes etc
 - Director level meetings with partners
- Strategic groups:
 - South Downs Partnership
 - Local Nature Partnerships
 - Land Managers Groups
 - LEPs etc
- Digital: website, social media etc
- Printed publications
- Events: Both in person and virtual.
- Media: Proactive and reactive media in print, radio and TV
- Peer-to-peer channels:
 - Meetings at officer level
 - Interactions between officers and volunteers and public etc

Conclusion and next steps

This Public Affairs Strategy is designed to enable us to carry out coordinated public affairs work on some of the key issues facing the National Park. It sits alongside the wider Communications & Engagement Strategy. The issues chosen are in no way a reflection that other areas are of lesser priority, rather, they are the key issues through which we know our public affairs work can have the most impact. They also align with our commitments to work as part of National Parks England to deliver on collective national goals.

By focusing on a clear and defined set of objectives, we are ensuring that we will use our finite resources to best effect.

- The Strategy will be delivered through the direct and proactive work of Members and officers.

- A short guide with key objectives and messages will be produced to support this proactive work by Members and officers.
- A concise annual delivery plan will be developed and overseen by SMT.
- We will gather data biannually from Members and relevant officers to ensure we are working towards achieving our objectives.

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