

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 19 JULY 2022

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

Present: Tim Burr, Melanie Hunt (Chair), Doug Jones, Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Martin Osborne, Henry Potter, and Stephen Whale.

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

Other SDNPA Members: Vanessa Rowlands (Chair of the Authority)

SDNPA Officers: Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive), Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Janice Austin (Deputy Monitoring Officer), Nigel Manvell (Chief Finance Officer), Lynne Govus (Temporary Head of Business Services), Robin Parr (Head of Governance), and Jane Roberts (Committee Officer).

Also Attended by: Anne Rehill (Performance and Project Manager), Jeremy Burgess (Landscape and Biodiversity Lead – Water), Veronica Craddock (Landscape and Green Infrastructure Lead), Nick Heasman (Countryside and Policy Manager), Nigel James (Countryside and Policy Manager), James Winkworth (Head of Marketing and Income Generation), Miriam Swan (Grants Officer), Ruth James (Communications and Engagement Officer), Vicky Paterson (HR Manager), Bruno Aveiro (Health & Safety Officer), and Liam Pippard (Chief Internal Auditor)

OPENING REMARKS

- 1 The Chair opened the meeting, welcomed all those present including the new Chair of the Authority, Vanessa Rowlands 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.

ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 2 Apologies were received from Annie Brown, Diana van der Klugt, Catriona Aves and Tom Fourcade.

ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 3 Martin Osborne declared an interest in Agenda Item 10, Chair of the Aquafer Partnership and also being a Brighton and Hove Council member.

ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 17 FEBRUARY 2022

- 4 The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 17 February 2022 were approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments:
 - Minute 169, bullet point 9, to state statutory duty rather than function.
 - Minute 183, bullet point 1, to replace the word replicated with remedied.
 - Minute 210, bullet point 1, change of a typo from manor to manner.

ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

- 5 The following comments were made:
 - Minute 162, that the legal services contract had been awarded to West Sussex County Council and the monitoring officer contract to Hampshire County Council.

- Minute 168, the work with Heritage Insider on the Corporate Plan measure for engagement was continuing and was planned to be brought before the P&R Committee in late 2022 or early 2023.
- Minute 169, the Nature Recovery Call for Sites had received 77 expressions of interest ranging from local Parishes to large estates. 33 sites had been identified and were being taken forward.
- Minute 170, the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) action plan outcomes had been endorsed by the NPA.
- Minute 174, the Climate Change action plan was being implemented, and local communities were also putting good practice into action.

ITEM 5: URGENT MATTERS

6 There were none.

ITEM 6: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

7 There were no members of the public who had requested to speak.

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

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

ITEM 8: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

9 The Head of Governance introduced report PR22/23-I and reminded Members of the report content.

10 The Committee commented that:

- Risk 2, finance and budgets, showed red in the risk register. This was in large part due to inflation, and the flat cash settlement. It was suggested that a report should be compiled with a heat map highlighting the NPA's specific inflation risks.
- Members of Parliament and colleagues in other National Parks had noted the strong working relationship between them and the SDNPA.
- There was a cumulative impact of risk, and the whole may be greater than the sum of the parts. Especially when there was an organisational review and change underway.

11 In response to questions officers clarified that:

- Risks were drafted prior to the Authority's current cost saving exercise.
- It was noted that the capacity to deliver would be affected by the reduction in staffing caused by the flat cash settlement.
- A key issue for the next budget round would be the potential tension between the need to consider a higher pay award versus the need to retain some headroom for project funding.
- The Authority was working closely with National Parks England.
- Following the Glover review, expectations were for an expansion of NPA ambitions, but flat cash would mean less expenditure and fewer projects. Following the structural changes, the transition period from September to the new financial year would result in a slimmed down but focused work programme. Partner organisations and stake holders were being kept informed as the Authority worked through the changes.
- Risk 23 was not perceived to be rising. Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) was in operation and the initial signs were positive. However, there could have been a lag in the data provided.
- Risk 23 would be looked at again following the meeting.
- The Reedbed treatment system at SSCP would be the subject of an assessment.

- The SSCP Road risk – Discussions had taken place with East Sussex County Council Highways engineers regarding speed limits. A new speed limit would be introduced of 30MPH at SSCP, exact dates were to be advised. Verge parking and a crossing had also been discussed with Highways and local police. A crossing would be considered in 2023/24. Progress had been made by engaging local councillors.

12 **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note the Corporate Risk Register as at July 2022.

ITEM 9: COUNTRYSIDE AND POLICY MANAGEMENT END OF YEAR REVIEW

13 The Chair welcomed officers from the Countryside Policy and Management Directorate who provided an update on progress during the year.

14 The Committee commented that:

- The challenges moving forward had been identified and compromises would need to be made. Officers were encouraged to highlight difficulties faced alongside successes.
- The Team was congratulated on delivering projects with limited resources.
- Smaller projects' success would benefit from scaling up.
- The wild deer population was at its highest level in 1000 years, and this had to be managed due to the impact on woodland management and regeneration. Deer fencing had a role to play but was not a substitute for effective control of numbers.
- With regard to increasing diversity amongst volunteers, Members would have liked to have seen the actual numbers of people that were engaged. All Members of the Authority should be advised about the work that was going on in this area.
- Cultural Heritage work, and engaging smaller groups was deemed very important.
- Water Neutrality should not just be seen as a planning issue, given the pressure on key wetland sites within the National Park.

15 In response to questions Officers clarified that:

- The SDNPA would be keen to be involved in future work on carbon baseline auditing with National Parks UK.
- Lesson learnt from projects were gathered systematically from evaluations and shared via an internal officer group.
- The Green South Downs Certification work was commissioned after a gap analysis of current schemes for businesses that were linked to a landscape found that none in the UK stretched to businesses delivering on sustainability. Green Tourism were the strongest bidders in the tender process with extensive national experience. 20 businesses were in the focus group and they were being consulted in the design of the scheme. The launch was planned for spring 2023, following a pilot phase in September 2022 and a progress report would be brought back to the Committee in due course.
- A baseline assessment had been undertaken with regard to the Pension Fund and fossil fuels divestment.
- Staff involved in our engagement work had directly connected people to the National Park by targeting specific groups. Generation Green was a national package of interventions that were scalable. Putting money in to smaller projects helped them along and helped them to gain more traction going forward. The MOSAIC project and its legacy was a good example. It was noted funding was limited, but creating capacity by working with other groups and individuals was a good approach.
- There had been an impact on partner working and what could be delivered due to Covid, but the SDNPA had been very proactive in continuing to work with and support other organisations.
- Whilst desirable, the establishment of a “Many to Many” online platform for parishes would probably need significant internal and external resource which the Authority did

not have at present.

- The deer population was significantly affecting woodland management and creation. Recent drone surveys in the National Park estimated 34 deer per sq. km, whereas the ideal was 5. Night time licences for culling deer had been issued by Natural England in order to address the issue.

16 **ITEM 10: Q4/YEAR END CORPORATE AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE REPORT 2021/22**

17 The Performance and Research Lead introduced report PR22/23-2 and reminded Members of the report content.

18 The Committee commented that:

- The handling of Called-In planning applications, the use of officer delegation and the potential tension between the planning system and our EDI objectives needed to be looked at.
- The data on complaints in the planning system should include Ombudsman and Judicial Reviews.
- Theme Programme Boards would need to generate more external income in the future. It was noted that there was collaboration between the Boards.
- Was the business newsletter being advertised outside the Park? That might bring more interaction between businesses inside and outside the National Park.
- The Annual Review document was commented on as being very impressive and would be available on the website once it has been approved by the National Park Authority.
- Regarding complaints, data about the number of planning applications should be available to see the actual scale of the problem.

19 In response to questions, Officers clarified that:

- Appeals and JRs were already considered by Planning Committee; if also brought to P&R Committee this would be duplication. A summary of other planning data could be given.
- The legacy of projects was always discussed with partners. All Theme Programme Boards were encouraged to view SDNPA core funds as “venture capital” and bring in external income where possible. The risk of silo working was recognised, and the TPB approach would be reviewed and streamlined after the restructure to ensure it was proportionate and fit for purpose.
- Officers would consider sending the business newsletter to firms outside the National Park.
- It was clarified that the term “we” on Page 34, paragraph 5.5, bullet point 2, referred to SSCP and that anything the Authority did was done in negotiation with the Company. The date of the report on page 35 at paragraph 6.2 should have read April 2022, not April 2020.

20 **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note the content of the Performance Report and highlight areas requiring further clarification or action.

ITEM 11: SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK TRUST: ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FUND

21 The Head of Marketing and Income Generation, accompanied by the Grants Officer introduced report PR22/23-3, and reminded Members of the report content.

22 The Committee commented that:

- Small communities could achieve a lot with seed funding from the Sustainable Communities Fund (SCF) and funding from other sources.

- A thank you was given to officers, to those on the SCF Panel, and others who supported the work.

23 **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to receive the year-end position of the Sustainable Communities Fund provided by the South Downs National Park Trust.

ITEM 12: PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN THEMATIC UPDATE: NATIONAL PARKS FOR ALL

24 The Performance and Project Manager gave a verbal report.

25 The Committee commented that:

- The Chair observed - from the recent Member workshop - that the SDNPA now had access to an enormous amount of expertise via its network of partners.
- There was a need to continue to broaden the opportunities available to people to experience the National Park and take back a positive experience.
- Members welcomed the balanced debate on bringing the National Park to people so they saw it as theirs.
- It was noted this work was not about driving up the overall numbers of visitors but broadening participation as set out in the High-Level Targets for the Corporate Plan. There was a risk this nuance could be lost in the National Parks for All strapline.

26 Henry Potter left the meeting and the committee had a comfort break at 12.55pm.

ITEM 13: PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN DELIVERY – FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES PROGRAMME & THE RURAL ECONOMY

27 The Countryside and Policy Managers for the Central Area and Western Downs introduced report PR22/23-4 and reminded Members of the report content.

28 The Committee commented that:

- Would Year 3 projects be bought forward should extra funding be given?
- Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) was a great success.
- Officers were commended for their excellent work, with 72 funding applications supported.
- If there were difficulties and challenges, the Committee was there to discuss them and offer support.

29 In response to questions officers clarified that:

- More Defra funding for the Year 2 budget was possible, but the money would need to be used in the same year. Prioritisation was being looked into.
- Regenerative farming techniques could be used more widely depending on local circumstances and the term encompasses a whole range of more sustainable farming techniques. There was a huge potential crossover between food production and restoration of biodiversity, the two did not need to be seen as always in conflict.
- The area of land supported by FiPL projects varied greatly. Some applicants had taken a whole farm approach, others focused on one area within their holding.
- Work was continuing with Farm Clusters on the developing Environmental Land Management Scheme and how nature recovery would be embedded in it. FiPL was only for Protected Landscapes but the lessons could be applied elsewhere.
- Green financing opportunities were very site specific. For example, a Phosphates Neutrality policy and resultant trading would soon come on line for the River Itchen catchment. The farm clusters and the existing relationships provided a good platform for this.

30 **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note progress on the delivery of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and Our South Downs.

31 The **Committee** adjourned for a lunch break at 1.26pm and resumed at 2.05pm.

ITEM 14: REVIEW OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS STRATEGY

32 The Communications and Engagement Manager introduced report PR22/23-5 and reminded Members of the report content.

33 The Committee commented that:

- It needed to be focused on Corporate Plan priorities and how the priorities were delivered. The recent Parish Webinar on community climate action was very important and opened the SDNP up to the wider community.
- There was some concern about the objectives for nature recovery and climate change being rolled together.
- If in the event the two issues conflicted it should be stated which one would take priority.
- Combining nature recovery and climate change meant the Authority had a chance to influence people on both issues simultaneously.
- The priority of the National Park being there for everyone was very important.
- It was important to continue to build links with Local Authorities for joined up thinking.
- A one page briefing document would be useful to demonstrate how climate change and nature recovery linked together.

34 In response to questions Officers clarified that:

- The strategy deliberately focused on the area of overlap between climate change and nature recovery (i.e. net zero with nature) as this was an area of expertise for the SDNPA and Local Authorities were a clear target audience on which we could bring influence to bear.
- The National Park for All did not exist on its own. It was about motivating a wider range of people to take action on nature recovery and climate change.
- National Park for All was not about continuously driving up visitor numbers but rather how the Authority could create champions and engage more diverse audiences.

35 **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to recommend the revised Public Affairs Strategy 2022-24, as set out at Appendix 1, including the two priority issues to be the focus of the Authority's proactive public affairs work for the period 2022-24, for approval by the NPA

ITEM 15: ANNUAL HUMAN RESOURCES AND HEALTH & SAFETY REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2021-2022

36 The Human Resource Manager introduced report PR22/23-6 and reminded Members of the report content.

37 The Committee commented that:

- They were pleased with the reduction in the gender pay gap.
- Excellent work on equalities data and interview data.
- Apprenticeships were vital moving forward.
- The days lost due to Muscular Skeletal illness seemed very high.

38 In response to questions Officers clarified that:

- The Peak District was offering Health and Safety (H&S) policy advice.

- Internal audits were carried out quarterly and advice, if required, was given by the Peak District advisor.
- Training had remained consistent, but H&S training had dropped off during the Covid-19 pandemic as it was an in person and practical course.
- Selling back services was already being considered e.g. by providing banking for generation green, and procuring discounted Insurance rates as a family of parks. HR had worked closely with other National Park Authorities on the shared e-Learning Management System and with the web recruit system.
- The Apprenticeships scheme was on hold, but the Authority could look to re-introduce it in the future once the new staff structure was up and running.
- The Muscular Skeletal figures were high due to a small number of long term absences.
- Covid cases were still high.

39 **RESOLVED:** The Committee noted the report.

ITEM 16: ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT AND UPDATED LOCAL CODE OF CORPORATE CONDUCT

40 The Head of Governance introduced report PR22/23-7 and reminded Members of the report content. There was an error in report, stating 20/21 should say 21/22.

41 **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

- 1) Approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2021-22 to accompany the Authority's Statement of Accounts; and
- 2) Note the updated Local Code of Corporate Governance.

ITEM 17: INTERNAL AUDIT – ANNUAL REPORT AND OPINION

42 The Chief Finance Officer introduced report PR22/23-8 and reminded Members of the report content. There will be a change to the report with the self-assessment currently stating May 2021 will be updated to 2022.

43 **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

- 1) Note the content of the Annual Audit Report (2021/22) and the Audit Opinion (2021/22) set out at Appendix I; and
- 2) Taking into account the content of the Annual Audit Report, to conclude that the Committee is satisfied with the effectiveness of Internal Audit during 2021/22.

ITEM 18: INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS AND IMPLEMENTATION

44 The Chief Finance Officer introduced report PR22/23-9 and reminded Members of the report content.

45 **RESOLVED:** The Committee Resolved to:

- 1) Note progress against the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan (2021/22).
- 2) Note the implementation of audit actions previously agreed by management.
- 3) Approve the recommended amendment to the 2022/23 Internal Audit Plan

46 The meeting closed at 3.08pm.

CHAIR

Signed: _____

