

## **SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

### **AUTHORITY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Held at 2.00pm on 5 July 2022 in the Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre, North Street, Midhurst, West Sussex, GU29 9DH.

Present:

Alun Alesbury, Heather Baker, Annie Brown, Tim Burr, Debbie Curnow-Ford, Chris Dowling, Janet Duncton, Angus Dunn, Barbara Holyome, Melanie Hunt, Doug Jones, Maggie Jones, Diana van der Klugt, Gary Marsh, Robert Mocatta, William Meyer, Ian Phillips, 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), Lynne Govus (Interim Head of Business Services), Robin Parr (Head of Governance) and Richard Sandiford (Senior Governance Officer).

Also attended by:

Andy Beattie (Countryside and Policy Manager – Wealden Heath) and Ruth James (Communications and Engagement Manager).

### **CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OPENING REMARKS**

1. The Chief Executive welcomed all present at the meeting and informed them of general housekeeping matters.

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

2. Apologies were received from Therese Evans and Martin Osborne.

### **ITEM 2. ELECTION OF CHAIR**

3. The election process was presided over by the Chief Executive and the Authority was informed that nominations closed at 12noon on June and there were two nominations.
4. The Monitoring Officer acted as the returning officer and informed the Authority that the valid nominations received were Ian Phillips and Vanessa Rowlands.
5. Ian Phillips and Vanessa Rowlands made brief statements to the Authority.
6. The election proceeded by means of secret ballot.
7. The Chief Executive informed the Authority that Vanessa Rowlands was elected as Chair of the Authority until the Authority AGM in 2023.

### **ITEM 3. ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIR**

8. The election process was presided over by the Chair and the Authority was informed that nominations closed at 12noon on June and there were two nominations.
9. The Monitoring Officer acted as the returning officer and informed the Authority that the valid nominations received were Tim Burr and Ian Phillips.
10. Tim Burr and Ian Phillips made brief statements to the Authority.
11. The election proceeded by means of secret ballot.
12. The Chair informed the Authority that Ian Phillips was elected as Deputy Chair of the Authority until the Authority AGM in 2023.

### **CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS**

13. 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.

14. The Chair informed Members that Agenda Items 15, 16 and 17 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 4. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

15. William Meyer, Isobel Thurston and Stephen Whale declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 14 as Directors of the South Downs Trading Company and declared that they would withdraw from the meeting for this item.

**ITEM 5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 19 MAY 2022**

16. The minutes of the Authority meeting held on 19 May 2022 were approved as a correct record.

**ITEM 6. URGENT ITEMS**

17. There were none.

**ITEM 7. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

18. There was none.

**ITEM 8. NEED FOR PART II EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

19. Members were asked to indicate if they wished to discuss any matters in the exempt Appendix 7 to Agenda Item 10. As no Members indicated they wished to discuss any matters in the appendix the meeting would not move into private session.

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

20. The Chief Executive introduced the report (NPA22/23-01) and gave the following updates:
- The recent award of the BusinessGreen Leaders Award for Nature-based Project of the Year to the Revere Project, a partnership between National Parks Partnerships and Palladium Finance.
  - Up to date figures for the Shoreham Cement Works Area Action Plan consultation which was currently underway.
21. The Director of Planning also updated the Authority on the recent award to the SDNPA of the Royal Town Planning Institute Chair's Award for "demonstrating how environmental principles and protections can inform sustainable placemaking to support the area's needs and the wider 'greener' planning agenda".
22. Members made the following comments:
- Planning officers were commended for their excellent professional work.
  - Recent SDNPA events were praised, including the Winchester Farm Cluster event, and Members were encouraged to attend one or more.
  - How often, when an application was called in from a host authority, was it decided under delegated powers rather than it being considered by the SDNPA Planning Committee? The principle of calling in an application which may have been considered at a host authority's committee, but then was not considered at the SDNPA's committee was undesirable. It should also be noted when considering this matter that host authorities employed a 'red card' system to enable councillors to bring an application before committee, but the SDNPA did not.
  - Members were encouraged to promote the recently launched Our South Downs business network which was focussed on promoting the rural economy and connecting land and business owners.

- The new facilities at Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) were praised and Members were encouraged to visit if they had not done so recently. The transformation was an example of the SDNPA as a bold and confident organisation.
  - Had National Highways (NH) made any response following the SDNPA's objection to the scheme at Junction 9 of the M3, perhaps suggesting changes to the scheme?
  - The Government's framework for food security must be rooted in practice. Defra should learn from the experience of FiPL.
  - The Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts Songbook website and online resources for music students were praised.
  - All Members offered their sincere gratitude to Barbara Holyome for her many years of service to the SDNPA.
23. Members were advised:
- The numbers of called in applications were not to hand at the meeting. Members would receive a response on this matter after the meeting.
  - Members would have the opportunity to view the facilities at SSCP on 20 September 2022.
  - No formal response had been received from NH regarding the M3 Junction 9, however, the SDNPA was in discussion with NH who did give great weight to our comments and we think we are getting some traction in some areas.
24. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to note the progress made by the South Downs National Park Authority (the Authority) since the last report.

**ITEM 10. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES AND OUTSIDE BODIES**

25. The Head of Governance and Support Services introduced the report (NPA22/23-02).
26. Members made the following comments:
- Carole Nicholson was thanked for her work as an independent member of the Policy and Resources (P&R) Committee.
  - Had any progress been made in recruiting a third co-opted member of P&R Committee?
27. Members were advised:
- Despite help and advice from relevant officers and members of the South Downs Partnership, the SDNPA had so far been unable to identify a potential third co-optee who would complement the experience of the current two co-optees whilst being able to manage daytime meetings in Midhurst. The search was to be extended more broadly.
28. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to:
1. Appoint the Planning Committee, Policy and Resources Committee and Appointments, Management & Standards Committee with the Terms of Reference set out at Appendix I, as the committees necessary to discharge the functions of the Authority.
  2. Appoint the Membership of Committees until the Authority AGM in 2023 as set out in Appendix 3 (to be tabled at the meeting) to this report.
  3. Appoint the Chair and Deputy Chair of Planning Committee until the Authority AGM in 2023 as set out in Appendix 6 (to be tabled at the meeting) of this report.
  4. Appoint the Chair and Deputy Chairs of Policy & Resources Committee until the Authority AGM in 2023 as set out in Appendix 6 (to be tabled at the meeting) of this report.
  5. Appoint the Members to outside bodies and panels until the Authority AGM in 2023 as set out in Appendix 5 (to be tabled at the meeting) to this report.

6. Agree, for the purposes of Standing order 8.1(e), that, in line with the Authority's established practice, the Committees appointed by the Authority may not arrange for the discharge of the Authority's functions by a sub-committee. All Committees retain powers under Standing Order 27 to establish Member Task and Finish Groups.
7. Appoint the named individuals set out in the exempt Appendix 7 to serve as Independent (CIPFA) Co-opted Members (non-voting) of the Policy and Resources Committee, to serve until the Authority AGM in 2026.

**ITEM 11. EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION WITHIN THE SDNPA**

29. The Countryside and Policy Manager - Wealden Heath introduced the report (NPA22/23-03).
30. The Chair of P&R Committee commented on the discussions that had been held within the SDNPA on this matter. The P&R Committee discussed the diverse background of both local communities and the wider public who might benefit from the National Park and the importance of ensuring opportunities for all to understand and enjoy the SDNP. Also, how important it was that the SDNPA ensured it was truly inclusive and offered equal opportunities to all. Any Members who had not yet attended the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training were urged to do so.
31. Members made the following comments:
  - A hunger to find out what potential users of the SDNP were looking for was needed. The ultimate test would be not just that the organisation had good internal processes, but that it also reached out into the service delivered.
  - This was a good foundation, but the challenge going forward as part of National Parks for All was to get already existing groups more involved with the SDNP and moving up the "Ladder of Stewardship". Although our ability to reach out was limited by resources, the groups were out there to engage with and keen to participate.
  - Was it known what proportion of SDNPA staff were based in Midhurst and whether that made a difference in terms of diversity?
  - The recent EDI training for Members was very good and it was very positive that Members were revisiting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 as part of this. The training also highlighted, through case studies and activities, the balancing act required sometimes between the Equality Act and the Planning Act.
  - If there were conflicting legislation, would the Planning Act override the Equality Act?
  - It was important to note that in the Public Sector Equality Duty the SDNPA was required to "have due regard to" the various matters under the Equality Act. It was about the process, rather than the outcome. Members may welcome some examples of how these worked together.
  - Engaging Members and the public was a challenge due to their jobs, other responsibilities they may have, the size of the SDNP, and the location and timings of the Authority's activities. It may be good to consider this as a separate issue.
32. Members were advised:
  - As the Authority moved to a more hybrid way of working, location may not present such an issue in the future. There was a larger group of employees around Midhurst, but also another around Brighton. It was possible the recruitment net needed to be stretched wider and this had been identified as a challenge. Some changes were being made with the aim of addressing this.
  - There was sometimes conflict in planning between the two pieces of legislation and it is understood that we have to work within the bounds of the Equality Act, it was particularly important in these situations to evidence why certain actions or decisions had been taken. This already occurred in all SDNPA planning reports to ensure we were sound in what we did.

33. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to:
1. Note the progress achieved to date regarding Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work and;
  2. Endorse the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan Objectives set out within Appendix 5.

**ITEM 12. RENATURE PREVIEW**

34. The Communications and Engagement Manager provided a verbal update on the ReNature Festival including, how the festival would take place, the themes of the individual days, festival packs that were being provided to underserved audiences, the events programme, and how Members could get involved.
35. Members made the following comments:
- Were other Local Authority Members sent this information, perhaps via their Member Services or Communications Departments? If not, this may be something to consider.
  - How would the success of this be monitored and evaluated?
  - Was there any way of building the Countryside Code into the festival to help the public understand it better?
  - Were all the events on our SDNPA events calendar?
  - Now that hybrid events such as these had become established, were people engaging a lot faster with these events now?
36. Members were advised:
- The SDNPA relied on Members to share these events through their networks.
  - Although monitoring was able to take place on number of attendees and virtual engagements, it was not known if these engagements would result in future visits to the SDNP. Feedback was encouraged, including from those who had received the festival packs.
  - In addition, there were measures around the “National Park for All” Corporate Plan Priority in terms of target audiences, numbers and consideration of the impact. Work was being undertaken with Heritage Insider to look at the most robust ways of measuring levels of engagement and the impact on individuals.
  - The SDNPA had maintained its virtual following, which was encouraging, and it showed the Authority was viewed as a reliable source of information.
  - The key points from the Countryside Code were threaded throughout the festival events.
  - The SDNPA events calendar was building back up following the shutdown of many organisations due to the pandemic, however, many of the larger external events had not yet returned.

**ITEM 13. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2021/22: PROVISIONAL OUTTURN**

37. The Chief Finance Officer introduced the report (NPA22/23-04).
38. Members made the following comments:
- The £15million of reserves available for investment seemed quite large for an organisation of this size. Could this be clarified?
  - The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) reserves had increased by £1m in the last year. Was the Authority inefficient in getting partners to spend it? Could we do more to get them to spend it?
  - Could the performance of the investment rate against the benchmark rate please be explained a little further?

- Were the CIL funds for Parish Councils held in our reserves or in theirs?

39. Members were advised:

- The balance held for investment was currently quite high; however, this did include CIL, S106 and other earmarked reserves which account for a significant proportion of the total.
- In particular, the SDNPA was currently holding quite a significant amount of CIL funds which had been allocated but not drawn down. Officers worked continuously to encourage recipients to implement CIL funded projects and draw down their allocations, and a number of proposed actions would work on reducing those reserves. Where money was not spent by partners or other Authorities, the SDNPA would be looking to recover those funds and reallocate them.
- The benchmark interest rate was very low at 0.04% and in the period covered by this report the performance of investments was generally weak due to the low Bank rate, however, investment returns did outperform the benchmark rate by 0.31%, and were improving as interest rates increased.
- Allocated Parish Council CIL funds were held in the Authority's reserves; given funds were held in their account.

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

1. Note the provisional 2021/22 revenue outturn position of a net £418,000 below budget variance for the 2021/22 financial year.
2. Approve the revenue budget carry forward requests from 2021/22 to 2022/23 of £1,030,000 as set out in Appendix 2 and approve the transfer of £122,000 to the Strategic Fund for 'Our South Downs' and 'Green South Downs'.
3. Approve the following Capital variations as detailed in paragraph 3.5, specifically:
  - (£23,000) reprofile to the 2022/23 financial year to fund a new vehicle.
  - (£584,000) reprofile to the 2022/23 financial year to fund completion of the Seven Sisters Capital Projects.
  - (£100,000) reprofile to the 2022/23 financial year to fund the setup of the Seven Sisters Trading Company.
  - (£3,000) reprofile to the 2022/23 financial year to fund completion of Phase 2 and future phases of the National Park Signage Project.
4. Approve the below budget revenue position of (£418,000) should be allocated to the following: £25,000 revenue contribution to Hampshire County Council for interpretation at Queen Elizabeth Country Park and the balance of £393,000 to be allocated to the Transition Fund.
5. Note the Treasury Management overview and position as at financial year-end 2021/22.

41. William Meyer, Isabel Thurston and Stephen Whale withdrew from the meeting, and Alun Alesbury left the meeting at 4pm.

#### **ITEM 14. GOVERNANCE MATTERS**

42. The Head of Governance and Support Services introduced the report (NPA22/23-05).

43. Members made the following comments:

- It was noted that these indemnity rules applied to all Local Authorities.
- In relation to the attendance requirements on Members in the Local Government Act, could it be clarified that this only included the meetings of the Authority and its committees and did not include workshops. Also, due to the consequences on a Member if they did not attend a meeting for 6 months, could Members be assured this was being monitored.

44. Members were advised:
- The attendance requirements for Members did only include the meetings of the Authority and its committees; and Member attendance was monitored by the Governance Team.
45. **RESOLVED:** The Authority resolved to:
1. Agree the amended Authority's Standing Orders for Regulation of Authority Proceedings and Business ("Standing Orders") as set out at Appendix 1 and instruct the Monitoring Officer to publish the updated Standing Orders.
  2. Approve the revised Indemnity for Members and Officers set out at Appendix 2 to take effect from the 6th July 2022.

**ITEM 15. PLANNING COMMITTEE**

46. Authority Members noted the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 14 April and 12 May 2022.

**ITEM 16. APPOINTMENT, MANAGEMENT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

47. Authority Members noted the minutes of the Appointment, Management and Standards Committee meeting held on 11 May and 25 May 2022.

**ITEM 17 PART II MINUTES OF THE APPOINTMENT, MANAGEMENT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

48. Authority Members noted the part II minutes of the Appointment, Management and Standards Committee meeting held on 11 May and 25 May 2022.
49. The Chair closed the meeting at 4.10pm.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

