

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 22 SEPTEMBER 2022

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

Present: Tim Burr, Peter Diplock, Angus Dunn, Melanie Hunt (Chair), Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Doug Jones, Michael Lunn, Martin Osborne, Henry Potter, Diana van der Klugt.

Co-opted Members of the Committee: Lawrence Leather.

Independent Members of the Committee: Catriona Aves, Tom Fourcade.

Other SDNPA Members: Vanessa Rowlands (Chair of the Authority), Heather Baker (Chair of the Planning Committee).

SDNPA Officers: Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive). Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Louise Read (Monitoring Officer), Nigel Manvell (Chief Finance Officer) Mark Winton (Chief Internal Auditor), Robin Parr (Head of Governance) and Jane Roberts (Committee Officer).

Also Attended by: Claire Kerr (Countryside and Policy Manager - Eastern), Pauline Stanway (Research and Evidence Officer), Chris Fairbrother (Landscape and Biodiversity Lead - Chalk), Mike Hughes (Major Planning Projects and Performance Manager).

OPENING REMARKS

46. The Chair opened the meeting

47. The Chair welcomed all those present 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.

48. Within the opening remarks, the Chair:

- Welcomed two new members attending their first committee and the attendance of the Chair of the Planning Committee.
- Noted the impending departure of the Head of Governance and expressed the thanks of the Committee and the Authority for his work.

ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

49. Apologies were received from Stephen Whale, Morris Findley and Annie Brown.

ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

50. Martin Osborne declared a public service interest as Chair of The Aquifer Partnership and as a Brighton and Hove City Councillor.

51. Tom Fourcade declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 11, as set out at minute 70.

ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 19 JULY 2022

52. The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 19 July 2022 were approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

- Page 3, Also Attended by: Ruth James (Communications and Engagement Officer), to replace the word Officer with Manager.
- Minute 2, Apologies for absence. Michael Lunn sent apologies but it had not been recorded, record apologies were sent.
- Minute 3, Aquafer should be spelt Aquifer.
- Minute 33, bullet point 3, reword to "...visitor numbers and open access to all everywhere but rather..."

ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

53. The Director of Countryside and Policy Management outlined the current situation of the Theme Programme Boards and that actions were in place to consolidate them into one board.

ITEM 5: URGENT MATTERS

54. There were none.

ITEM 6: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

55. There was none.

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

56. There was no recommendation to consider any item in private session.

ITEM 8: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

57. The Head of Governance introduced report PR22/23-12 and reminded Members of the report content.
58. The Committee commented that:
- Had there been any communication or feedback from Defra on the new Ministerial Team?
 - Risk 2, Finance and Budgets, budget was deemed insufficient to carry out the cost of project work. Almost certain there would not be enough finance to carry out projects and the direction was worsening. Perhaps further mitigation would be possible.
 - Members indicated their support in minimising the financial risks as far as possible.
 - Members asked about the pressures on recruitment of planners and asked for further reassurance about the management of this risk.
 - Risk 16, staffing issues were worsening, but the SDNPA was not alone and it was happening across the country. The cost of living crisis was putting pressure on staff. Was there anything further that the Authority could do to support staff, both those leaving the organisation, as well as those remaining?
 - The budget cuts, and the consequent impact on staffing, was a difficult task that had been well managed.
 - No other NPA had gone through a restructure process at that time; Members noted that the SDNPA was ahead of the curve. Core staff were needed though to deliver externally funded projects.
 - How far was Defra aware of the acute funding situation and its potential impact on delivery? The letter sent in August to the Secretary of State, which had not had a response, should be followed up.
 - The importance of all Members attending the forthcoming budget workshops was reiterated.

- Risk 20, nothing had been mentioned on cyber security. The financial impact could be significant.
 - The importance of cyber security was understood by all.
59. The Director of Planning joined the Meeting.
60. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The Planning newsletter highlighted what had been done and would be done within the South Downs National Park.
 - There would be a new Minister for water; existing Minister would remain for National Parks. Currently responsibilities were shown as blank on the Defra website at the time of the meeting. More information would follow. Work was ongoing in Defra.
 - Water, food production and the economy were departmental priorities. The Secretary of State had contacted water companies to discuss how they could tackle sewage pollution.
 - Risk 2, the direction of travel was worsening even with the £1m cost cutting, however, it had secured the basis to deal with the next 2 years of flat cash. Thanks was given to all staff members for dealing with the process.
 - Fundraising had secured £2.8m for 2022, £2.3m going forward into 2023.
 - It was clarified that finance and remuneration were interlinked. A government announcement that was due to happen the day after the P&R Committee meeting would have an impact. Staff wellbeing was key and Simplyhealth, was a Health Plan available to all staff. Mental Health Wednesday and the flexible working policy were also offered to staff.
 - Budget workshops would go ahead and Members were encouraged to attend every session.
 - Once Ministers had been appointed to Defra more details would follow. The annual review would happen in November and delivery on past and future projects would be covered.
 - Cyber strategy risk lies within the SDNPA Corporate Strategy directorate. Regular audits were completed. The Authority had been the victim of two phishing attacks recently and two-factor authentication had been introduced as a security measure.
61. **RESOLVED:** The Committee noted the Corporate Risk Register as at September 2022.

ITEM 9: PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN DELIVERY – NATURE RECOVERY

62. The Countryside and Policy Manager (Eastern) introduced report PR22/23-13) and reminded members of the report content.
63. The Committee commented that:
- Aspects of the Environment Act 2021 had yet to be clarified, .It was asked how would they operate Nature Recovery and how could they move forward without this clarity?
 - Why were large amounts of money needed to be raised for the delivery of Nature Recovery when the land was privately owned?
 - Was good to see land owners were coming forward and welcoming renaturing.
 - Was the Call for Nature campaign raising expectations that money was there, when that might not have been the case?
 - There were 46 applications that were not accepted. What was the selection process and

areas, and were there other sites that did not come forward but were very significant? Would we need to approach them?

- Acknowledgement was given by all Members to the excellent work that had been done. Social media had helped promote the project, would there be more tangible promotion around the Park of what had been achieved and how people could get involved? Appendix 2 was very impressive and well considered piece of work; this could be used to promote good practice.
- Could communities come forward even if they did not own land?
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), how could this be further extended to partner planning authorities?
- Landowners needed to be aware that farming with nature did not mean losing production. Building an economic case for nature was essential.
- Which actions would have the greatest impact on climate change?
- Local Authorities were doing exemplary things, would there be a way of sharing their good practice and illustrating how they were engaging with communities?
- Would have liked to have seen where the funding had come from as part of the report, outlining the work and funding streams in future reports would be helpful. A Biodiversity officer could be employed in a collaborative role with all local authorities if the costs of employing one per authority were too high.
- Concern was expressed about BNG and how it was going to be monitored in the medium to long term.

64. In response to questions Officers clarified that:

- Nature Recovery Strategies would be tier 1, Hampshire, West Sussex, East Sussex County Councils, and Brighton & Hove City Council. The Sussex strategies would have a common evidence base. SDNPA was likely to be invited to be part of a steering group on this. The SDNPA was awaiting the regulations and guidance from Defra to be published following the Defra consultation in 2021.
- It had been identified that there was a resource gap for the tier 1 Authorities. Natural England had put in a resource of Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) advisers for each of the LNRSs around England to deliver action for nature recovery.
- The target for SDNP was 13,000 hectares managed for nature by 2030 and the focus was on delivery supported by the best available evidence base.
- Funding of £100m figure for the target over 10 years, works out at around £600 per km. Based on the cost of recreating the habitat. Funding will come through various mechanisms including carbon offsetting, biodiversity net gain, agro-environment schemes, and project funding and grants through the South Downs National Park Trust.
- The estimated £100m to deliver nature recovery would be an inward investment in the SDNP, with funds going directly to farmers and land managers. It would not all come through the Authority.
- Call for Nature Sites was run and promoted as a pilot scheme, it was not a grant and this was made clear. The officers working on its implementation were conscious of managing expectations of applicants. Partnership working was also important in delivering sites for nature
- Some Call for Nature site applications did not qualify to go forward for various reasons; Outside the National Park, planning constraints or longer term projects not ready to move forward yet. There were 31 that were able to move forward at the present time

and some were being worked on already. All applications were voluntary and in future years such an approach could be used in a more targeted way, either spatially or by habitat or river catchment.

- Promotional work on the renature campaign was delivered by the SDNPA communications department. Applications needed to come from the landowner, not a community or third party who did not own the land. The Call for Nature sites were part of nature recovery.
- Biodiversity Monitoring was very challenging, deemed a step by step approach. Biodiversity and farming could go hand in hand. It had been identified there was a need for a Biodiversity Officer and recruitment was underway at the time of the meeting.
- Nature based solutions dovetail with climate change projects. Nature recovery based around reducing carbon emissions and improving carbon capture and storage were targeted, pulling the two areas together.
- There was always a contract between landowner and developer for BNG to ensure delivery.
- BNG has been fixed for 80 years and that was extremely important. Primary responsibility to manage and monitor this was with each local authority. Collaboration and partnerships looking at having an LNRS and BNG post and the Sussex Local Nature Partnership was collaborating with an existing network.

65. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

1. Note progress on the delivery of the Nature Recovery programme.
2. Endorse the direction of travel for future work with regard to Nature Recovery as set out in section 6.

66. The Committee adjourned for a comfort break at 12:04.

ITEM 10: QI CORPORATE AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23

67. The Director of Countryside Policy & Management introduced report PR22/23-14 and reminded Members of the report content.

68. The Committee commented that:

- In regard to the 5% reduction in the overall carbon footprint of the National Park, could some further detail be included on what else was in hand for this target.
- They commended what was taking place in support of National Park for All. Perhaps, as part of the Local Plan review, some attention could be given to not only giving people a means to get into the National Park, but also activities that could be promoted to draw people into the National Park, such as festivals, camping, or sporting facilities.

69. **RESOLVED:** The Committee received and considered the content of the Performance Report.

ITEM 11: ANNUAL REVIEW OF PLANNING PERFORMANCE: FINANCIAL YEAR 2021/22.

70. The Major Planning Projects and Performance Manager introduced report PR22/23-15 and reminded members of the report content.

The Committee commented that:

- More information on enforcement work would have been helpful, and what actions had been taken.

- Separate Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) headline messages should be included in the reporting.
- Developments on the boundaries of the SDNP were having implications for the infrastructure within the Park.
- Supplementary planning documents could have been included in the report.
- There were 175 new homes that had been completed, 11 of which were affordable. Planning Permissions granted in the year should include affordable as well as market homes in the report.
- There had been variations in performance across the Park within the host authorities, What was being done to monitor this and deal with difficulties in staff recruitment, how was this being managed?
- How were call-ins being managed, did the SDNPA need to call so many applications in?
- Shoreham Cement Works, what is the current outlook on the site and development?
- Tom Fourcade declared he had previous involvement with a developer who had created plans around Shoreham Cement Works.
- Officers within the department were thanked for their work.

71. In response to questions Officers clarified that:

- Despite a high number of staffing vacancies all government targets had been met. The Authority also had a good record at appeal. Enforcement action was taken was always in proportion to the seriousness of the breach. Many complaints were resolved through negotiation. At the other end of the scale there were injunctions when SDNPA would go to court for the most serious breaches.
- The CIL report was delivered earlier in the year, and not included in this report.
- Affordable housing had been delivered on sites, permissions were key and there were high affordable housing percentage targets in the local plan. Going forward the numbers of affordable homes granted planning permission would be included in the report.
- Pressure on the boundaries, was actively dealt with in the local plan through duty to cooperate and would be revisited as part of the local plan review.
- Regular performance monitoring and management was undertaken with the Host Authorities, including at a senior level.
- Shortage of staff was being addressed with temporary consultants being used. Streamlining some of the reports was a priority. Pre-apps and call ins were increasingly being left with the host authorities as they had the Design Guide and Local Plan (i.e. common documentation and policies across the National Park). The SDNPA was actively recruiting new staff for the planning department.
- Shoreham Cement Works was deemed a key site, and had an area action plan with own mini local plan. Officers were working with the owner and their new partners. Might be joined up with the local plan review. It would need to be an exemplary development.
- Developments should generally have their Biodiversity Net Gain provided on site, however, should another location be needed, this would be assessed on a case by case basis.

72. **RESOLVED:** The Committee received and considered the Annual Review of Planning Performance.

ITEM 12: BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2022/23: MONTH 4

73. The Chief Finance Officer introduced report PR22/23-16 and reminded Members of the report content.
74. The Committee commented that:
- It was good to see a greater diversity of investments in response to changes in the market. It would be advantageous not to allow reserves to grow artificially and redeploy underspend funds before the end of the financial year.
75. In response to questions Officer clarified that:
- With flat cash settlements for the next 2 years, there would be significant future challenges in budget setting.
76. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
1. Note the 2022/23 Revenue Forecast position as at month 4 of a net (£269,000) below budget variance.
 2. Note the 2022/23 Capital Forecast position as at month 4 of a zero budget variance.
 3. Note the Reserves position as at month 4, as set out at Appendix 3.
 4. Note the Treasury Management overview and position as at month 4, as set out at Appendix 4
77. Tom Fourcade left the meeting at 12.57.

ITEM 13: INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS AND IMPLEMENTATION

78. The Chief Internal Auditor introduced report PR22/23-17 and reminded Members of the report content.
79. The Committee commented that:
- There were significant achievements across the organisation, and currently within budget; however forward planning would be critical. Officers were thanked for their hard work.
80. **RESOLVED:** The Committee noted progress against the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan (2022/23).

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 13:04.