

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**  
Date **8 December 2022**  
By **Authority Chair**  
Title of Report **Authority Chair Update**

**Note**

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**Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to note the update from the Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority.**

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**1. Introduction**

1.1 This report outlines the activities of the Chair and the Members of the SDNPA since the last NPA meeting on the 20 October 2022.

**2. Parish Workshops**

2.1 This autumn saw the return of our in-person Parish workshops. Due to Covid, these haven't taken place since 2019. Three evening meetings were held across the three counties within the Park with Iford Village Hall (East Sussex), the South Downs Centre, Midhurst (West Sussex) and Meonstoke Village Hall (Hampshire) as the venues.

2.2 The agenda for the meetings was split into two halves; the first focused on the forthcoming Local Plan review and the Design SPD, with the second half as an interactive forum for parishes to share learning, ideas and projects relating to Climate Action at a local level, together with an open Q&A session.

2.3 There was a lot of interest in the idea of Parish Priority Statements, as a potential new, simpler form of neighbourhood planning and the opportunity to meet in person again was very much appreciated by all who attended. There was 45 minutes set aside at each event for an open Q&A to raise local issues with members and officers, who included SMT, Rob Ainslie, Lucy Howard and Mark Waller-Gutierrez from Planning. Topics ranged from River abstraction, traffic calming through villages, BOATs, agri-tourism & farm diversification, housing and Ouse Valley CARES.

2.4 Thanks to the Ruth, Josh and the events team for producing such well-attended interactive events and thanks also to the parish members, Alun Alesbury, Doug Jones, Andrew Shaxson and Richard Waring for chairing and hosting the Q&As. I had the benefit of attending all three meetings in my role as Chair and East Sussex Parish member and to have the chance to speak to parish councillors across the Park.

2.5 These Parish workshops are an important part of our Public Affairs strategy. The next set of Parish meetings will be held in the Spring and will also be in-person.

**3. Member strategy meetings**

3.1 Since October, Members have had two meetings to discuss strategic direction on the topics of Climate Action and the Local Plan Review.

- 3.2 Members gathered virtually to be guided through the updated Climate Action Plan by Lead officer Chris Fairbrother. Understanding where and what actions SDNPA can take to have the most impact is crucial with limited budgets. The paper went to P&R committee in November (See CEO report). This will form part of the forthcoming budget debates.
- 3.3 The process and timeline of the Local Plan review was discussed at a well-attended, in-person meeting on 17th November. Feedback from the recent Parish workshops, the forthcoming DLUC Levelling Up bill, staff changes and the Shoreham Cement works AAP contributed to the discussion.
- 3.4 Thanks to all members who attended these workshops.

#### **4. National Parks England**

- 4.1 On 3rd November I attended, along with Trevor Beattie, the NPE board meeting held in York.
- 4.2 The meeting was preceded the day before with a visit, hosted by North York Moors, of their visitors centre at Sutton Bank. This was an opportunity to learn how another NPA supports visitors of different physical abilities. I was impressed by the range of accessible paths on offer and a purpose built Dark Night Skies circular viewing bench. NYM's focus was very much on the visitor experience. Inside the centre was an impressive exhibition about the Upper Rye river catchment restoration project, Ryevitalise. This is a large project funding farmers and landowners in the western Rye catchment to improve local water quality, support nature recovery and improve soil health through Nature-based solutions.
- 4.3 The Board meeting the following day was dominated by the issue of funding. All NPAs are challenged by the cuts from Government to NPA core grants. Lake District NPA and SDNPA are the only two Authorities, at present, to have under-taken a restructuring programme recently. Many of the other Authorities are embarking on the same painful process; deciding what they can and can no longer do. Sadly, Exmoor NPA have decided that even with a reduced annual contribution, they could no longer afford the subscription to NPE. This is not, in my view, a sensible decision. Defra have made it clear that they only wish to communicate with one body, speaking for all the NPAs in England. This, absolutely, is a time for a strong, united NPE body.
- 4.4 Defra have agreed to fund a Strategic Engagement Manager to work for NPE in supporting the new Landscapes, Parks & Trails Partnership. This person will be in place for a year.
- 4.5 The Board agreed to fund the next year of NPE secretariat at its current workload and that NPE Comms should focus its attention on influencing Government decision making with regards to NPAs' core grant funding. Directors agreed that the public needed to understand the financial difficulties facing England's National Parks.
- 4.6 I have attached an NPE Update dated November 2022 in Appendix I.

#### **5. Nature Recovery**

- 5.1 Eastern Ranger Tim Squire took me on a tour to see the chalk heathland restoration work at Lullington Heath in the Eastern Downs. Chalk heathland is a rare habitat and it was great to see how important the discretionary budget that the ranger teams have, so that can move quickly to hire small contractor to do nature recovery work. The same principle was at work on neighbouring chalk grassland, where, with the help of fantastic machinery, light work can be made of the gorse clearance. In a particular patch, Tim showed me the careful interventions he's made to help support the Grayling butterfly population, which has been saved from extinction in this area.

#### **6. Cultural Heritage**

- 6.1 Doug Jones and I were given a tour of the stunning Alison Crowther and Kate Boucher: Traces in the Landscape exhibition at Petersfield Museum & Art Gallery by Louise Weller, Head of Collections & Exhibitions in November. Doug is a trustee of Petersfield Museum & Art Gallery and was able to show me the parts of the museum and displays that had been supported by SDNPA.

6.2 Some members and officers were able to attend the launch of Sussex Landscapes – Chalk, Wood and Water, the new exhibition at Pallant House Gallery in Chichester. The exhibition features paintings, photographs and sculpture from across Sussex, many of them iconic South Downs views by artists such as Eric Ravillious, Turner, Duncan Grant and Ivor Hitchens.

6.3 Heather Baker and I attended the official opening of Fernhurst Pavilion on 5th November. Members approved an application from the Fernhurst Recreation Ground Trust for £200k of Community Infrastructure Levy Funds in 2021 and it was fantastic to see how the money had been spent and hear how the wider Fernhurst community will benefit from the cricket, tennis and rugby clubs, as well as a café for all.

## 7. Members activities

7.1 Members have been active representing the Authority and I extend my thanks to;

- Ian Philips, who attended the shadow Transport for South East board meeting on 14th November, representing the South East's Protected Landscapes.
- Martin Osborne for representing the SDNPA at the opening of the Liz Williams Butterfly Haven Nature Reserve at the Dorothy Stringer school in Brighton. The Nature Reserve will provide a valuable wildlife educational resource right on the doorstep of many schools.
- Robert Mocatta attended a celebration photocall in Farringdon, Hampshire. Funding from South Downs National Park Trust together with the Woodland Trust and East Hants DC has helped the Parish Council save a 3,000-year-old Ancient Yew Tree.
- Debbie Curnow-Ford for deputising for Therese Evans and attending the Hampshire Rural Forum.

## 8. Conclusion

I am happy to respond to any questions that may arise from this update and will provide any further updates as needed at the meeting.

## VANESSA ROWLANDS

### Authority Chair

### South Downs National Park Authority

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Appendices	I. National Parks England Update November 2022
SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive; Head of Governance.
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	None





## National Parks England update November 2022





Below are some brief notes highlighting recent progress and delivery at a national level under the headings, nature, climate, people and place

### 1. Nature

**Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) delivery** 88,287metres of hedgerow planted, ~45,000ha of habitat improvement for biodiversity\*, ~40,000ha of habitat connectivity improved\*, ~16,500ha of positive management on SSSIs\* (\*because of overlap only use one of these metrics at once)

**Nature recovery ambition** Natural England supported NPE earlier in 2022 to develop a business case for Nature delivery setting out our ambitions at a national level.

#### Our Ambitions:

 <p><b>34,350 ha of new native woodland</b> (including woodlands, forests, hedgerows and trees)</p>	 <p><b>460 km of freshwater system improvements</b> (including rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands and coast)</p>	 <p><b>44,060 ha of grassland and heathland restoration</b> (including species rich meadows, grasslands and heathland)</p>	 <p><b>44,050 ha of peatland restoration</b> (including blanket bog, raised mires, flushes and fens)</p>
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In line with this Nature ‘prospectuses’ have been prepared for each National Park

Support from a short term ‘NPE Strategic Programme manager’ post for Nature Recovery is progressing this work – also resourced by Natural England

**Building Team Nature** 23 organisations inputted to the development of the Business Case and are being invited to feedback sessions in the next few weeks

A series of joint sessions focused on building our joint ambitions for Nature recovery are underway – the first took place with the RSPB at Haweswater in October

**The case for investment** Next steps - supporting development of project portfolios for each National Park, sharing good practice and working on funding opportunities

## 2. Climate

**FiPL delivery** 203 projects to reduce flood risk, 187 projects to improve soils quality, 121 ha woodland creation

**Carbon baseline assessments** for 15 UK National Parks, and 7 AONB/National Landscapes completed by Small World Consulting. Support from NE to complete five of the baselines in English National Parks

**'Race to Zero'** Application to join for the UK National Parks was submitted in November 2021; premised on the carbon baseline work. We're waiting to hear the outcome.

**Peatland restoration** Project steering group for roadmap to restoration of our peatlands. Richard Drysdale (Dartmoor) is representing NPE on this new working group.

## 3. People

**FiPL public engagement:** 197 projects supporting public engagement, 150 projects making landscape more inclusive for visitors, 78 projects delivering educational access, 39 new permissive paths

**FiPL farmer engagement:** 1,831 farmers have engaged in the programme, working with Protected Landscapes teams to deliver projects. Within this total there has been a focus on:

- *Building new relationships* - 748 (41%) of these had never previously engaged with their local Protected Landscape team.
- *Reaching new audiences* - 253 (14%) farmers have never previously had an agri-env scheme
- *Supporting Collaboration* - FiPL has created 25 new farm clusters and helped support 62 existing ones

**Volunteering:** 41,000 volunteer days were supported by National Park Authorities in 2021/2022. Valued at £41 million

**Generation Green** This 16 month partnership project provided more than 115,000 opportunities to connect young people to nature – many for the first time – and to cultivate a sense of care for the natural environment

Next steps - preparing a case for support to the Dormant Assets Fund and Lottery Community Fund. We have had positive feedback from DCMS to support this approach.

**Natural History GCSE** We met in October with OCR (examination board) and made the case for a strong element of outdoor learning and National Park profile. This will be discussed further at the Educators meeting in November.

**Landscapes for Everyone Programme Board** Work on a Business Case to establish a Programme Board has been completed and potential funding opportunities are being pursued.

**Access Officers** are working with Debbie North on developing a joint project. Debbie was recently appointed by the Cabinet Office as the Government's Disability and Access Ambassador for the Countryside.

**Internal working group established for EDI.** Initial meeting is on 17 November and will share good practice and consider the findings of the 2022 'All the Elements' report.

**Health and Wellbeing collaboration** across National Parks is continuing on the agreed themes of 'prevent, restore and excel' with officers meeting in November to develop a suite of case studies, playing to the strengths of the different National Parks, aimed at reaching a range of audiences.

**A Memorandum of Understanding** for NPE to work with OHID has been drafted and submitted to them for discussion.

#### **4. Place**

**FiPL delivery** 5,700m of drystone walling restored, 21 SHINE features maintained or improved

**Development Management delivering National Park purposes.** 8,100 planning applications were received in 2021/2022. 91% of planning applications were approved (compared with 88% national average)

**Rights of Way** 17,200 km of public footpaths / rights of way were looked after by National Park Authorities in 2021/2022.

**Enhancing access** Defra has confirmed funding (£1.64 m over 3 years for National Parks) for enhancing access across the Protected Landscape – a series of positive projects are being lined up for delivery.

