

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 24 NOVEMBER 2022

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

Present: Annie Brown, Tim Burr, Melanie Hunt (Chair), Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Doug Jones, Martin Osborne, Henry Potter, Diana van der Klugt, and Stephen Whale.

Co-opted Members of the Committee: Morris Findley and OlaOlu Adedayo.

Independent Members of the Committee: Catriona Aves.

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

SDNPA Officers: Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive), Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Mark Alden (Enterprise Development Lead), Nick Heasman (Country and Policy Manager), Chris Fairbrother (Landscape and Biodiversity Lead - Chalk), Claire Kerr (Countryside and Policy Manger – Eastern), Louise Read (Monitoring Officer), Hayley Madgwick (Purchasing Officer), Kate Miles (Facilities and Property Officer), Nigel Manvell (Chief Finance Officer) Mark Winton (Chief Internal Auditor), Richard Sandiford (Head of Governance) and Jane Roberts (Committee Officer).

Also Attended by: Rob Hindle (Rural Solutions) and Andy Conlan (Grant Thornton, External Auditor).

OPENING REMARKS

81. The Chair opened the meeting.

82. 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.

83. Within the opening remarks the Chair:

- Welcomed two new Members attending their first committee and the attendance of the Chair of the Planning Committee.

ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

84. Apologies were received from Peter Diplock, Tom Fourcade and Lawrence Leather.

ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

85. Martin Osborne declared a personal interest in Agenda Items 9, 12 and 15 as Chair of The Aquifer Partnership and as a Brighton and Hove Council member.

86. Melanie Hunt, Doug Jones and Vanessa Rowlands declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 8 as they were acquainted with the public speaker, Sir Sebastian Anstruther, as he was a former Member of the SDNPA.

87. Stephen Whale declared a pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 8 as in his professional life he has often been instructed by Rural Solutions consultants and he said that he would leave the room during the consideration of this item. He added that he had also made this connection clear when he provided his feedback on the last draft of the Whole Estate Plan.

ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 22 SEPTEMBER 2022

88. The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 22 September 2022 were approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments:
- Page 5, in the list of those present, change Osbourne to Osborne, and van de Klugt, change to van der Klugt.
 - Minute 64, Bullet point 4, change from £600 per km, to £6,000 per sq. km per year.
 - Minute 77, change Forcade to Fourcade.

ITEM 4: UPDATES ON PREVIOUS COMMITTEE DECISIONS

89. A number of funding scenarios would be looked at during the budget workshop which would be taking place on 14 December 2022, the attendance of all Members was crucial.

ITEM 5: URGENT MATTERS

90. There were none.

ITEM 6: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

91. The Chair decided that public speakers would speak at the start of the relevant item.

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

92. Officers advised that there was no requirement to consider any item in private session.
93. Stephen Whale left the meeting at 10.40am.

ITEM 8: BARLAVINGTON ESTATE WHOLE ESTATE PLAN

94. Sir Sebastian Anstruther addressed the Committee as a public speaker for 3 minutes and commented how useful the Whole Estate Plan (WEP) process had been in helping to structure the Estate's thinking. Sir Sebastian saw his role as investing to produce the infrastructure, the farms, the land, and the buildings within which other people can run their businesses, particularly through finding new uses for redundant farm buildings. The aim was to maintain the Estate as a commercially viable business recognising its responsibilities to society, nature and to his family.
95. The Enterprise Development Lead and Countryside and Policy Manager introduced report PR22/23-18 and reminded Members of the report contents.
96. The Committee commented that:
- Paragraph 5.2, highlighted that the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) would continue to work with the Estate. How would this work with the SDNPA's budgetary constraints?
 - It was a well-written document and issues previously raised had been dealt with. With the economic downturn concern was shown for the demand for rural business sites, and how the Estate might adapt going forward.
 - The Estate remained well preserved and was a fine example of a working Estate.
 - Ongoing support to and communication with tenant farmers was very important.
 - Feedback on the WEP process from the Estate would be very helpful going forward.
 - Was the WEP process the same for public estates as for private ones?
 - The Chair thanked the Barlavington Estate for a very comprehensive WEP.
97. Members were advised:

- There was a need for the Authority and the Estate to work together to get the best outcome in many areas, such as Duncton Watermill which needed to be safeguarded and be preserved for what it was, and affordable housing within the Fittleworth neighbourhood plan. The annual monitoring programme of WEPs was an important part of continuing to work with estates.
- Annual monitoring of WEPs was built into the work programme of the Authority
- The WEP outlined that letting the buildings in the Estate would support the Estate, this would also enable natural capital investment and support the rural economy. The range of business spaces was attractive to many diverse business sectors. The economic downturn had been taken into account by the Estate.
- The WEP process was the same for Trusts, Public and Private Estates.

98. **RESOLVED:** The Committee endorsed the Barlavington Estate Whole Estate Plan.

99. Stephen Whale returned to the meeting 11.24am.

ITEM 9: CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN – UPDATE 2023/24

100. The Director of Countryside Policy & Management and the Landscape and Biodiversity Lead (Chalk) introduced report PR22/23-19 and reminded members of the report content.

101. The Committee commented that:

- Net Zero Target for the National Park Authority currently had no lead officer named in the plan, when would there be someone identified to lead?
- Once the Climate Action Plan was approved, how would we communicate this to Partners?
- Appendix 1, page 126. The objective to work with local authorities was all about planning, and not about other officers in local authorities that were heading up climate change programmes.
- Appendix 1, page 127. Once permission had been granted, when the discharge of conditions had been completed, there was a risk that non-approved changes could be actioned if there was insufficient monitoring.
- Appendix 1, page 128. How could proposed actions on emissions and work with smaller communities make a difference?
- Appendix 1, page 128. It would be beneficial to share what was happening in the first year of the Ouse Valley project.
- Appendix 1, page 129. How could communities be encouraged to spend money on community energy schemes?
- Appendix 1, page 129. We should make sure that early work on the local plan takes note of the work of the Nature Recovery Networks.
- Appendix 1, page 130. Transport and sustainable access. Would the SDNPA be planning its own projects on transport and sustainable access?
- There were many schemes going forward to encourage new woodland planting.
- Retrofitting could be rolled out more widely, working closely with local authorities would help.
- Social media should be used more to get younger people involved in projects in and around the park.
- The budget would need to be addressed in the current climate, but it was encouraging

to see pollinators as a core part of nature recovery.

- Was there a report to show the cut in emissions over the last 2 years?
- Would duty to cooperate be abolished, if so when? Also, when would the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Nature Recovery Networks be emerging?
- Would climate change training still be happening?
- It may be possible to work with suppliers of electrical charging infrastructure to also generate some income from the sale of electricity.
- The SDNPA should be focussing on the things no one else is doing to maximise our output. Consider which programmes we should particularly focus on.

102. Members were advised:

- Corporate Services had agreed to pick up monitoring of the Net Zero target for the NPA going forward.
- The committee was not approving the Climate Action Plan, which will form part of the Corporate Plan update, only considering progress against it.
- The Ouse Valley Climate Action project was an example of how the action plan was engaging partners. Officers acknowledged that work needed to be done to promote the Action Plan more widely across the NP.
- The SDNPA was actively working with local authorities and regularly attended climate change meetings with them.
- The issue of non-compliance with planning conditions was a national issue but the SDNPA aims to ensure that the climate benefits of schemes were not materially diminished and conditions were not simply waived.
- Similar to Nature Recovery programmes, working with Parish Councils, and helping them to understand what contribution they could make to reduced emissions and the changes they could make, may help drive Community Energy Schemes.
- One Planet, a web application tool, was being looked at to provide an online platform for different bodies to share their CC action plans and for all to share best practice, this could be rolled out to all the National Parks.
- Some transport and sustainable access projects would be picked up by the Major Projects team, but they were often resource intensive and less would need be done due to limited resources. A list of what the Authority could no longer support would be communicated to stakeholders.
- Officers were working with the Communications team to engage younger people and involve a wider audience. The NPUK Communications group were adding in a national dimension to this.
- Climate change training would be happening through outreach and engagement.
- The SDNPA carbon footprint was relatively small and under our direct influence. The wider National Park footprint was more of a challenge and it was important to work with the local authorities to look at nature based solutions. Despite all measures to ensure rapid reductions through their operations, Local Authorities are likely to need to procure a significant number of carbon offsets in addition. SDNPA can play an important brokerage role between LAs / developers and landowners.
- The SDNPA is waiting for the Environment Act 2021 Regulations and Guidance from Defra on Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Nature Recovery Network to be published. SDNPA had been involved with readiness preparations for the LNRS

development through the Responsible Authorities (Hampshire, West Sussex, East Sussex with Brighton & Hove County Councils) as well as through the two Local Nature Partnerships. SDNPA has been invited to sit on the Board of the Hampshire LNRS and on the Working Group for the joint Sussex approach to LNRS

103. **RESOLVED:** The Committee:

- 1) Received and considered the draft SDNPA Climate Change Action Plan 2023-24 as set out at Appendix I; and,
- 2) Recommended the draft SDNPA Climate Change Action Plan 2023-24 to the NPA for approval as part of the Corporate Plan 2020-2025 Year 4 Action Plan 2023-24.

104. The Committee adjourned for a short comfort break.

ITEM 10: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

105. The Head of Governance introduced report PR22/23-20 and reminded members of the report content.

106. The Committee commented that:

- Risk 25, The Landscape Review, when will this be removed?
- Risk 23, it was proposed this be removed going forward.
- Risk 7, should be described as a major impact rather than a high impact.
- Risk 21. The residual risk cross on the table was possibly in the wrong place.
- Risk 2, is it actually riskier than proposed?
- The Risks will be reviewed, and budget workshops are in place to look at forward planning in the light of the risks facing the Authority.

107. Members were advised:

- Risk 25, The Landscape Review could not be removed from the register as elements of it had been picked up by Defra and work was ongoing in the department. NPE was having regular meetings with Defra and we're awaiting a response on the details arising from the Landscape review.
- Risk 21 would be reviewed prior to the next committee.
- The Authority had taken out £1.2m of fixed costs to reduce the impact of Risk 2. With, at best, 2 years of flat cash settlement to be expected going forward, further cuts in the future could not be ruled out. The Member workshop on 14 December 2022 would consider a series of scenarios on this subject.

108. **RESOLVED:** The Committee noted the Corporate Risk Register as at November 2022.

ITEM 11: Q2 CORPORATE AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23

109. The Project Management Lead introduced report PR22/23-21 and reminded Members of the report content.

- The Committee commented that the progress report on Seven Sisters Country Park report looked positive and the Committee looked forward to seeing the Park develop.

110. Following a brief discussion with the Monitoring Officer at the beginning of this Item, Stephen Whale identified that, as a Director of South Downs Commercial Operations Limited, he had a personal interest in this Item (as the company's performance under the Seven Sisters Country Park Operating Agreement was being considered by the Committee) and therefore he did not take part in any debate or vote on this Item.

111. **RESOLVED:** The Committee received and considered the Q2 Corporate and Project Performance Report 2022/23.

ITEM 12: SOUTH DOWNS CENTRE CLEANING CONTRACT PROCUREMENT

112. The Head of Finance & Corporate Services and Purchasing Officer introduced report PR22/23-22 and reminded members of the report content.

113. The Committee commented that:

- Paragraph 1.1 Bullet point 3. Surely it would be in the Authority's interest to hold the current contract at the same price? Was the proposed new contract in the SDNPA's interest as the Authority could end up paying more?
- The increases in minimum wage could increase the cost.
- What would the weighting be when considering this?
- Equality, diversity and inclusion should be borne in mind when considering the awarding of the contract.
- It was suggested that the Authority's financial delegations be reviewed to ensure appropriate operational matters could be actioned by the Chief Executive, rather than requiring approval by the P&R Committee.

114. Members were advised:

- By continuing with the current contract, the SDNPA could be open to a contract variation and increased costs so there is less risk in a new procurement exercise.
- It should not be assumed that a new supplier would be more expensive. The new contract would focus on the changing needs of the Authority and would have tighter Key Performance Indicators (KPI's).
- The weighting would be 60/40 quality to cost. The aim would be to use local labour.

115. **RESOLVED:** The Committee:

- 1) Approved the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor to undertake cleaning services for the South Downs Centre.
- 2) Delegated authority to the Chief Executive to award contracts for the above, following a competitive process as described in the report.

116. The Committee adjourned for a break at 12:48pm.

ITEM 13: BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2022/23: MONTH 6

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

118. The Committee commented that the under spend on staffing was not a surprise and could help with putting together a realistic budget for next year.

119. Members were advised that most of the underspend was due to lower than expected planning costs and the Authority carrying more vacancies. The best use of the underspend for this financial year was being considered, invest to save proposals were being considered. This would be covered in the two Budget workshops on 14 December 2022, and 31 January 2023.

120. **RESOLVED:** The Committee:

- 1) Noted the 2022/23 Revenue Forecast position as at month 6 of a net (£528,000) below budget variance.
- 2) Noted the 2022/23 Capital Forecast position as at month 6 of a zero-budget variance.

- 3) Noted the Reserves position as at month 6, as set out at Appendix 3.
- 4) Noted the Treasury Management overview and position as at month 6, as set out at Appendix 4.

ITEM 14: EXTERNAL AUDIT FINDINGS AND OPINION

121. The External Auditor introduced report PR22/23-24 and reminded Members of the report content.
122. The Committee commented that:
- The Chair thanked the External Auditor for the update of regulatory changes.
 - As the grant decreased in size, would it affect the audit and would other income be taken into account?
 - How was carbon being considered in the Value for Money (VfM) audit?
 - What role did Darren Wells play in the Authority's audits?
123. Members were advised:
- The audit was based on expenditure rather than income; how the Authority spent its resources.
 - The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) had not yet outlined how to consider value for money in carbon, but the National Audit Office and CIPFA were considering the matter. The P&R Committee would review the VfM audit in February 2023.
 - Darren Wells was a Director at Grant Thornton and a Key Audit Partner for the audit.
124. **RESOLVED:** The Committee received and considered the findings as set out in The Audit Findings for South Downs National Park Authority, Year ended 31 March 2022 at Appendix I.

ITEM 15: AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2021/22 AND LETTERS OF REPRESENTATION

125. The Chief Finance Officer introduced report PR22/23-25 and reminded Members of the report content.
126. The Committee commented that it would be interested to see the trading company accounts next year.
127. Members were advised: that the trading company would usually be reported on at the September P&R Committee Meeting.
128. **RESOLVED:** The Committee:
- 1) Noted the Commentary on the Statement of Accounts set out in Appendix I.
 - 2) Approved the Statement of Accounts 2021/22 as set out in Appendix 2 for publication and agree that they be signed and dated by the person presiding at the Committee.
 - 3) Authorised the Chief Finance Officer to sign the formal Letter of Representation as set out in Appendix 3 on the conclusion of all audit queries.

ITEM 16: INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS AND IMPLEMENTATION

129. The Internal Auditor introduced report PR22/23-26 and reminded Members of the report content.
130. The Committee commented that:
- Given the ICT update, perhaps the Committee should have sight of the directorate risk

registers to ensure a clear understanding of the Authority's risk processes.

- Noted that expenses claims and procedures had been reviewed and that appropriate systems that were in place.

131. Members were advised:

- That arrangements for the Trading Company's IT Audit were in hand.

132. **RESOLVED:** The Committee noted progress against the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan (2022/23)

133. The meeting closed at 14:04

CHAIR