

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING

Held at 1.00pm on 14 December 2022 in the Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre, North Street, Midhurst, West Sussex, GU29 9DH.

Present:

Alun Alesbury, Heather Baker, Annie Brown, Tim Burr, Chris Dowling, Janet Duncton, Melanie Hunt, Doug Jones, Diana van der Klugt, Gary Marsh, William Meyer, Ian Phillips, Henry Potter, Vanessa Rowlands, Andrew Shaxson, 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 (Head of Corporate Services), and Richard Sandiford (Head of Governance).

Also attended by:

Dean Orgill (Chair of the South Downs National Park Trust), James Winkworth (Head of the South Downs National Park Trust / Head of Marketing and Income Generation), and Peter Cousin (Commercial Manager).

CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

100. The Chair of the Authority welcomed all present and informed them of general housekeeping matters.
101. 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.
102. The Chair informed Members that Agenda Items 14 and 15 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 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

103. Apologies were received from Debbie Curnow-Ford, Maggie Jones, Michael Lunn, Robert Mocatta, Martin Osborne, and Isabel Thurston.

ITEM 2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

104. There were none.

ITEM 3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 20 OCTOBER 2022

105. The minutes of the Authority meeting held on 20 October 2022 were approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments:
 - Minute 55, bullet 4 – Steven spelled with a “ph”
 - Minute 76, bullet 2 – amended to clarify that damage was “... in or next to a National Nature Reserve”. Also, when comment was made on the Annual Report on Access Management, the minute should have said “happened” rather than “happen”
 - Minute 76, bullet 3 – Amended to read: “... The Authority should not be concerned about any need to draw up further policy or any challenge to the making of TROs ...”
 - Minute 83 – As the land managers group no longer existed, reference to it should be removed.

ITEM 4. URGENT ITEMS

106. There were none.

ITEM 5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

107. There was none.

ITEM 6. NEED FOR PART II EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

108. As no Member wished to raise any point of accuracy in the part II minutes of the previous meeting there was no need for the meeting to move into private session.

ITEM 7. AUTHORITY CHAIR UPDATE

109. The Authority Chair introduced the report (NPA22/23-13) and gave updates on the following:

- Recent market at Seven Sisters Country Park
- Recent Member Budget Workshop and a reminder about the next workshop on 31 January.

110. Members made the following comments:

- Perhaps future parish meetings could be publicised more widely amongst Members.
- Were there any positive outcomes from the Transport for the South East board meeting?
- Byways Open to All Traffic were raised at a recent parish meeting. It would be good to be able to report back on progress with updating the accord with Hampshire County Council (HCC). Should P&R or the NPA be monitoring this?
- Members may find it helpful to have a briefing note explaining what the National Parks Partnership is.
- Given Exmoor's withdrawal from National Parks England it was important that Members were kept up to date on what was happening nationally.

111. Members were advised:

- There were some positive amendments included in the future strategic plan including specific mention that all schemes should have regard to section 62 and incorporate measures to improve biodiversity. It was hoped this would make a significant difference to future transport schemes across the south east.
- A meeting was being arranged with HCC staff to progress work on the accord. Reporting would come under reporting on the partnership management plan for which a good system was in place.
- Defra was working up the business case for the partnership. Although it was Defra policy that the partnership should be launched in April, this had not yet been approved and there was currently little to share on the partnership.

112. **RESOLVED:** The Authority noted the update from the Chair of the SDNPA.

ITEM 8. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S PROGRESS REPORT

113. The Chief Executive introduced the report (NPA22/23-14) and provided the following updates:

- The final meeting of the Seven Sisters Project Board had been held. Thanks were expressed to all staff and Members who were on the Board.

- Although there were no amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) proposed by Defra ministers, however, amendments had been proposed by Gary Streeter so weight was being put behind these. It was disappointing that the only remaining Landscapes Review proposal being put forward was the partnership.

114. Members made the following comments:

- Had the application for the M3 Junction 9 been submitted?
- Para 4.4 made reference to the Hampshire Board and the West Sussex Steering Group in relation to Local Nature Recovery Strategies, was there a difference between the two approaches?
- Was the Planning Tour open to all Members to attend?
- The good planning performance of the Authority was noted. Members should be aware of the challenges currently being faced in the recruitment of staff in planning. It was very important to be able to recruit and retain good planning staff.
- The green finance initiatives were good. Could more information be given on them?
- Supportive of the Summit in 2024.

115. Members were advised:

- The application for the M3 Junction 9 had not yet been submitted.
- There was a difference in the ways Hampshire and West Sussex were engaging, but it was their choice how to engage on this. The work in Hampshire was slightly more advanced.
- The Planning Tour was open to all Members to attend.
- More information on green finance would be provided to Members at the workshop on 31 January.

116. **RESOLVED:** The Authority noted the progress made by the South Downs National Park Authority (the Authority) since the last report.

ITEM 9. UPDATE FROM THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK TRUST

117. The Chair of the Trust and the Head of the Trust provided a verbal update on the activities of the Trust.

118. Members made the following comments:

- Thanks were expressed to the trustees and staff of the Trust for their work.
- Would the Trust be able to help with funding permissive paths?
- Did some of the Trust's partners sometimes provide back-office administration on projects?
- Was long term maintenance built into projects with landscape interventions?
- The involvement of Rampion in the Downs to the Sea project could be considered.
- The Chair of the Sustainable Communities Fund panel thanked the Trust for its support for community projects.
- Was there any concern that Defra would look to the Trust to fund the Authority?

119. Members were advised:

- The walking and cycling projects funded had reduced due to a lack of availability, however, the Rother Valley Way was a potential future

- Sometimes a partner organisation may be leading a project, in which case they would often provide administrative support.
- Long term maintenance plans were dependant on the project. Beelines, for example, included a future management plan, however, Tree for the Downs was simply the provision of trees.
- The Trust is independent of the Authority and is a charitable fundraising organisation so it is unlikely to be considered

ITEM 10. UPDATE ON SOUTH DOWNS COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS

120. The Chair of the Board of Directors of South Downs Commercial Operations Limited (SDCOL) introduced the report (NPA22/23-15).

121. Members made the following comments:

- What was the vision for the SDCOL going forward, as there didn't seem to be many commercial operations in the report?
- Was the Board meeting often enough to be able to intervene in operational matters as needed?
- Why was the Authority's offer of the solar panels declined?
- As part of the reforecasting, had any actions been taken to try and still achieve the budget outcome?
- Was it possible the camping barn may be opened first if the opening of the cottages was delayed? Could an update be given on the plans for running the accommodation.
- During visits to the site Members had noted the cheerfulness of staff on site. The road crossing at the park was acknowledged as a big obstacle to extra people visiting the Visitor Centre though.
- Could an update be given on the basic payments (BPS) and countryside stewardship (CS).
- Although the site was very busy at peak times, where there any plans to increase visitors during off peak times?

122. Members were advised:

- Although the SDCOL was not tied to only running Seven Sisters Country Park and would likely in the future look to broaden its horizons, its current focus was solely on the successful running of that site. The site's turnover this year was approximately £500k, however, there were a number of sources of income that were being developed and this was expected to grow to £600-700k next year. The spend per head on site had doubled since SDCOL had taken on the site; there was more that could be done but it was important that the public could still access the park.
- The Board was meeting at least quarterly with additional meetings as required. SDCOL would be looking at options in the new year to ensure Directors are able to deal with on the ground matters.
- The matter of the solar panels was currently under discussion and the Board would be receiving a report and recommendation shortly on this.
- As part of the reforecasting exercise, a significant amount of work was done around costings and actions were taken in response to this. The Board regularly monitored how the Company was doing against its business plan and budget.

- As all the accommodation would be operated as a whole it was not possible to open the camping barn and cottages separately. A tender process was under development and was likely to take place in the new year.
- The road crossing was a known issue. It was possible that the developments to Exceat Bridge and the proposed 30mph zone would help, however, the long-term solution was likely to be a road crossing. There were also plans to improve the north car park which would give people access to the Visitor Centre without having to cross the road.
- BPS was being received for the site, however, there have been challenges in entering a CS scheme due to a disagreement between Natural England's (NE) requirements and the requirements of the SDNPA through the Landscape Management Plan for the site. A new application for CS was being worked on with NE.
- There was a new Visitor Services Manager in place who would be creating a year-round programme of activities so there was always a reason to visit, even in the usually quieter months.

123. **RESOLVED:** The Authority noted the progress made by South Downs Commercial Operations Limited.

ITEM 11. OUSE VALLEY CLIMATE ACTION UPDATE AND PROCUREMENT OF A MONITORING AND EVALUATION CONSULTANT

124. The Head of Marketing and Income Generation introduced the report (NPA22/23-16).

125. Members made the following comments:

- This was a very inspiring project that community groups were very enthusiastic for. A great example of a project hitting the bullseye of Corporate Plan priorities.
- Was the £125k part of the £2m funding, rather than coming from the Authority?
- Would learning points be able to be identified during the project rather than only at the end?
- Was the team confident that 5 suitable tenders would be received?
- Was an equalities assessment being undertaken for this?

126. Members were advised:

- The £125 was from the £2m funding. By outsourcing this aspect, the Authority's team could focus on work on the ground.
- The learning will be regularly monitored by a group at the Authority and considered quarterly.
- The Authority has an evaluation framework with a number of companies which, along with companies suggested by the lottery, it is hoped will result in suitable responses to the tender.
- This would be put through an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion assessment.

127. **RESOLVED:** The Authority:

1. Approved the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor to undertake monitoring and evaluation services for the Ouse Valley Climate Action project.
2. Delegated authority to the Chief Executive to award a contract for the above, following a competitive process as described in this report.

128. William Meyer left the meeting.

ITEM 12. LOCAL PLAN REVIEW AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

129. The Director of Planning introduced the report (NPA22/23-17) and updated on the recent letter from Michael Gove on even more significant changes proposed to the planning system.

130. Members made the following comments:

- Appendix I seemed to give the impression that nothing would happen until Q4 24-25. Could officers confirm that work will be starting before this and that the adoption date was the earliest it could be?
- Would this be a light touch or more thorough review?
- Was there any progress on a strategy for dealing with water neutrality?

131. Members were advised:

- There has been some work already done, such as that on the Shoreham Cement Works Area Action Plan, which would contribute to the Local Plan Review and work would continue on the evidence base and the house need assessment. There was also work with communities around Neighbourhood Development Plans and Parish Statements that would be done.
- Whilst it was expected the review would be fairly light touch as main strategic aims of the plan seemed good, time had still been allowed in the timetable to review policies where necessary.
- There was a potential water neutrality strategy coming forward, however, the development industry itself was also coming up with solutions to the issue.

132. **RESOLVED:** The Authority:

1. Noted the current uncertainty in national and regional planning matters and the Authority's resourcing for the in-development Shoreham Cement Works Area Action Plan and Local Plan Review
2. Approved the integration of the in-development Shoreham Cement Works Area Action Plan into the Local Plan Review
3. Approved the Local Development Scheme (eighth revision) for the South Downs National Park, incorporating a revised timetable for the Local Plan Review, as set out in Appendix I of this report.

ITEM 13. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES

133. The Head of Governance introduced the report (NPA22/23-18).

134. Members made the following comments:

- As only 24 of 27 Members were appointed to a committee, could the situation with the other Members be clarified.
- Did this change take effect immediately?

135. Members were advised:

- The Chair of the Authority was not appointed to a committee and two other Members were not appointed to a committee as it was considered their skills were best used to support other areas of the Authority's work.
- The change to committees would take effect immediately. The appointment of John Hyland to the Planning Committee would take effect once his appointment to the Authority had been confirmed by the Secretary of State.

136. **RESOLVED:** The Authority:

1. Amend the membership of Committees, as set out at Appendix 1; and,
2. Subject to his appointment to the Authority being made by the Secretary of State, to appoint John Hyland to the Planning Committee with effect from the date of his appointment to the Authority if later than the date of this decision.

ITEM 14. PLANNING COMMITTEE MINUTES

137. Authority Members noted the minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held on 8 September and 13 October 2022.

ITEM 15. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES

138. Authority Members noted the minutes of the Policy & Resources Committee meeting held on 22 September 2022.

ITEM 16. PART II MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 20 OCTOBER 2022

139. The part II minutes of the Authority meeting held on 20 October 2022 were approved as a correct record.
140. The Chair closed the meeting at 3.41pm.

Signed _____

