

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**
Date **30 March 2023**
By **Authority Chair**
Title of Report **Authority Chair Update**

Note

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

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 14 December 2022.

2. Member Strategic Direction Days

2.1 Members had a Strategic Direction day in Eastbourne at the end of January, when we visited the Towner Gallery to hear about their plans for the next few years. The Gallery will be hosting this year's Turner Prize competition and Joe Hill, Director of Towner Eastbourne, talked through what a positive impact this would have on Eastbourne, and to the wider visitor economy. Towner Eastbourne also secured funding worth £500k to support outreach into the local community around the Turner Prize exhibition.

2.2 As has been reported before, Towner Eastbourne and Eastbourne Borough Council were successful in securing £11m worth of Levelling Up funds to develop Black Robin Farm, part of the Eastbourne Downland estate. Their plans involved turning the existing buildings on the site into an educational space, gallery space and commercial space, including for artists. Members were keen to know how the public would access the farm and then the wider landscape. What opportunities were there for new footpaths linking into the network in that area? How will this link into the Eastbourne Downland WEP Land management plan and potential for nature restoration? What time pressures are involved with the project with connection to the Levelling Up funding?

3. New Member Inductions

3.1 An Induction Day was hosted at the beginning of March for several new (co-opted and full) members to the Authority. The day consisted of presentations at SDC, including a very clear explanation of the Authority's CIL structures by Gill Welsman, together with some time out in the local areas of the Park.

3.2 Ranger Angela Ward took Members on a walk along the river Rother to Woolbeding and discussed her work with local farmers on action they can take to limit the amount of soil run off that can pollute the river.

3.3 New members were also then taken to Singleton to see the progress of the Centurion Way project. The current stage is going through the disused Singleton station and Alistair Linton-Crook talked us through the vegetation clearance work, which has taken place on site and

which revealed the two extra-long platforms. Huge efforts that have been made to work as sustainably as possible.

- 3.4 The normal schedule of member induction days returns this July, when we are expecting a large number of new members to the Authority as a result of the May Local elections. The first induction day will be 4 July, with the second part to follow in September.

4. Meetings Held in the Park

- 4.1 Thank you to all members who came to the workshop held in Lewes at County Hall on 27 February 2023. This preceded the P&R Committee's meeting at the same venue. Getting the Authority out into the Park is so important and I've been delighted by the positive feedback from members.

5. South Downs Partnership

- 5.1 The Partnership met in January to be given the opportunity to hear the latest on the Defra/funding situation, and about the ways the SDNPA may need to adjust the Corporate Plan to reflect tighter resources. The aim was to ensure that partners were comfortable with the way the SDNPA is prioritising its work and with what it will not be able to do, so they could be well-informed champions and manage expectations of others.

6. Parish Workshops

- 6.1 By the time of the NPA meeting, I will have attended all 3 of this Spring's in person Parish workshops. The first of which was held in the newly refurbished Pump Barn at Seven Sisters County Park, on what was the coldest night of the year.

- 6.2 The agenda featured presentations on Parish Priority Statements, using community greenspaces to benefit people & nature and the new Digital Hubs being produced for the website. The evening also featured plenty of time for Councillors to ask questions of members & officers and share information on their own projects or work that have benefited their communities and which could provide learning for others along the themes of Climate Action, Nature Recovery and Access.

- 6.3 Further meetings were held at the South Downs Centre, Midhurst and at Meonstoke Village Hall.

- 6.4 Thank you to the officers for all the hard work it takes in delivering these events. Meeting face to face with our communities is so vital to good information flows.

7. National Parks England

- 7.1 The APPG for National Parks held a meeting for MPs and Peers on 7 March 2023 to update them on the work of these Protected Landscapes and focused on their offer to the Nation.

- 7.2 The meeting highlighted the huge potential of National Park Authorities, their partners and supporters to drive forward nature recovery, tackle climate change, and enhance people's lives.

- 7.3 Appendix I is an infographic that was shared at the meeting.

8. Lewes Climate Change Hub

- 8.1 March 16 2023 saw the official launch of the Climate Change hub in Lewes. This is part of the wider Ouse Valley CARES project and will be complimented with further hubs in Newhaven and Seaford. Lewes District Council have given the project use of the prominent Lewes House building at the top of the high street and so is visible in the heart of the community. Members of the public are able to visit the hub to get help & advice on energy efficiency improvements to their homes and importantly, what funding is available to help, together with information from a host of groups on other ways to live more sustainably.

9. Liss Place Making

- 9.1 Doug Jones and I were given a tour of Liss village, in March, by councillor Andy Smith and the Chair of Liss Parish council, Keith Budden, on the improvements that have been made to Liss village through their CIL funding allocation. These included village gateways and signage,

which have been produced in collaboration with SDNPA and HCC. We also were shown plans for future improvements. It was great to see the benefits that CIL funding is making in our communities.

10. Sustainable Communities Fund – Report from Doug Jones (Chair of group)

10.1 The Panel, which is mainly comprised of experts from outside SDNPA (including representatives of the Trust), considered 4 projects at its meeting on 28 February. They were all very good and each one was addressing different issues.

10.2 All 4 were awarded grants and each showed how we can make valuable contributions to a wide range of community initiatives through the SCF awards:

- A project at the Benfield Hill Local Nature Reserve in Brighton was seeking a grant to provide two new interpretation boards as part of celebrations marking the designation of the reserve 30 years ago. The information boards should enable more people to enjoy the site with its rich biodiversity and wildlife. They will indicate walking trails and highlight what to see during the year, thus helping the site play a role as a recreational and educational resource. Events to mark the 30 anniversary aim to reach out to people from diverse backgrounds in local communities, schools and colleges. The project should help inform people about the rarity of chalk grassland and may encourage more people to volunteer to preserve the habitat.
- The ‘Lost Railway’ project was also seeking a grant to provide educational information boards. This initiative intends to bring to the attention of both visiting and local community walkers and cyclists some of the local history around Bramber. Steyning and Bramber railway stations were very close to each other and the line played a role in the development in the area, linking Shoreham and its port with Horsham to the north. The area now benefits from the Downs Link which broadly follows the line of the old line and connects with other cycle and walking routes. The interpretation boards should add a layer of heritage interest for users and they will provide QR code links to a range of other resources.
- In Petersfield an SCF grant will enable an attractive, traditional wooden shelter to be constructed at the Community Garden on the Adhurst Allotments. The Community Garden has developed over the last ten years but the lack of a shelter has been a deterrent for some school visits and other groups. The new structure, incorporating a green sedum roof, should provide a hub for volunteers as well as enabling more training days, youth volunteering and other events. It is hoped that it may also encourage an increase in volunteer numbers and group visits.
- There is a proposal in Lewes to hold four traffic-free pilot days in the centre of the town (building on existing street closures) to help promote active travel, reduce carbon emissions and mitigate climate change. Agreement from all stakeholders has yet to be finalised but if the pilot events take place an SCF grant would be available to fund surveys of businesses and shoppers etc, including survey analysis and report writing. The intention is that the surveys would help identify components that find favour and those where further work and/or amendments could be made for subsequent pilots.

11. Departing Members

11.1 The majority of the local authorities within the Park, excepting the Counties and Winchester parishes, have elections to contest this May. A number of our current members, at the time of writing, have informed the Authority that they will not be standing in these and therefore, once a new member has been nominated by their authority, will no longer be members of SDNPA. I would like to express my gratitude to them in this report, as they will not be present at the next NPA in July.

11.2 Thanks to Thérèse Evans (Winchester CC), Diana van der Klugt (Horsham DC), William Meyer (Lewes DC), Martin Osborne (Brighton & Hove CC) and Isabel Thurston (Arun DC).

11.3 Special thanks to Ian Philips, who leaves after 10 years as a Secretary of State appointed member. He has been Deputy and Chair of the Authority in that time and played a

prominent role of the planning committee, using his skills as a landscape architect. We all thank him for his leadership through the Covid/lockdown years and wish him well for the future.

- 11.4 And to Doug Jones, who after 12 years as the parish member for the East Hampshire area of the Park, will not be returning in July. Doug has been an important and active presence on the Authority. He was part of the Authority in its setting up phase years ago and has been on both the Planning and P&R committees, the last of which he also chaired (2020-2021). The Authority will greatly miss his insights and the enthusiasm he has for National Parks and the benefits they can give to the many communities within and surrounding the Park.

12. 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 Our Value to the Nation infographic
SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive; Head of Governance.
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	None