

Report to **Policy & Resources Committee**  
Date **20 July 2023**  
By **Communications & Engagement Manager**  
Title of Report **Year end report on the Communications and Engagement work Programme**

**Note**

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**Recommendation:** **The Committee is recommended to receive and consider progress on the communications and engagement work programme.**

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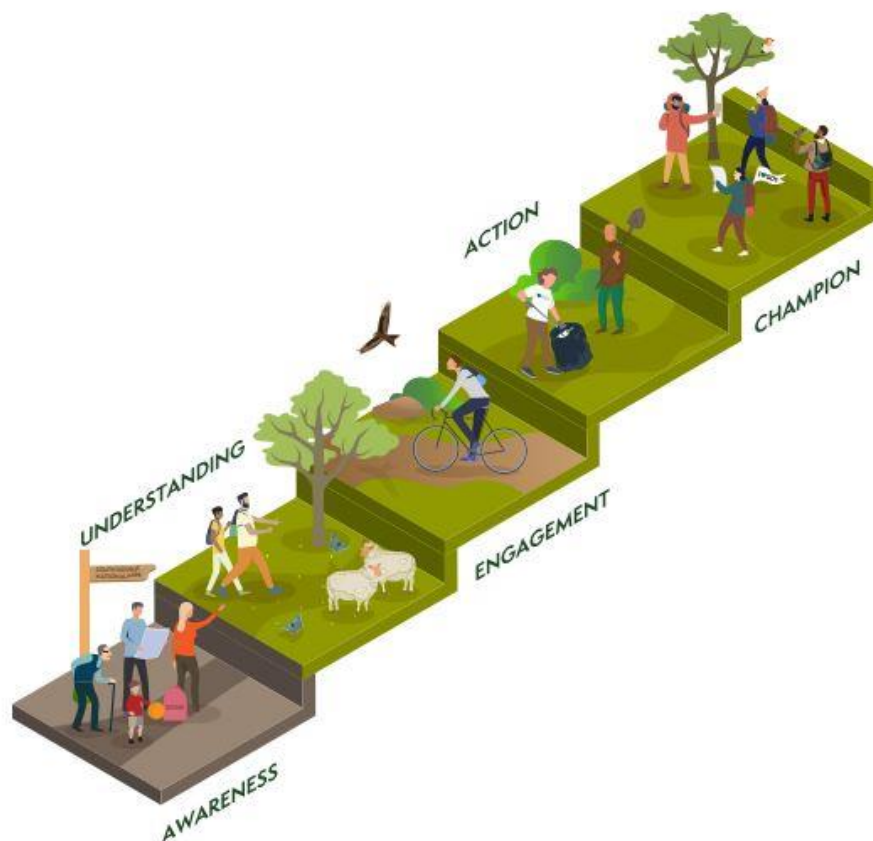
**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The communications and engagement work of the Authority is determined by two key, inter-related strategies, the Communications & Engagement Strategy 2020-25 (agreed by the NPA in December 2020) and the Public Affairs Strategy (2022-24) (agreed by the NPA in October 2022).
- 1.2 Each year we report back to P&R Committee on our communications and engagement, and public affairs work.

**2. Our Communications & Engagement work**

- 2.1 Our Communications & Engagement work proactively sits at the heart of the delivery of both the Partnership Management Plan (PMP) and our Corporate Plan (CP):
- 2.1.1 Our communications and engagement work sets out to create a connection between people and the South Downs National Park – as individuals, communities, businesses, landowners and partners. It then seeks to move them along the ladder of stewardship to taking action to care for it (Figure 1).
- 2.1.2 This is often the first point of connection for visitors, residents, partners and policy makers and it therefore lays the foundations for our wider engagement, outreach and project work.
- 2.1.3 It demonstrates how all aspects of our work – including conservation, policy and planning – contribute to the delivery of our PMP and CP.
- 2.1.4 It also enables our fundraising and income generation both through our own communication and engagement work, that for Seven Sisters Country Park, the South Downs National Park Trust, National Park Partnerships and in support of our commercial work.

Figure 1

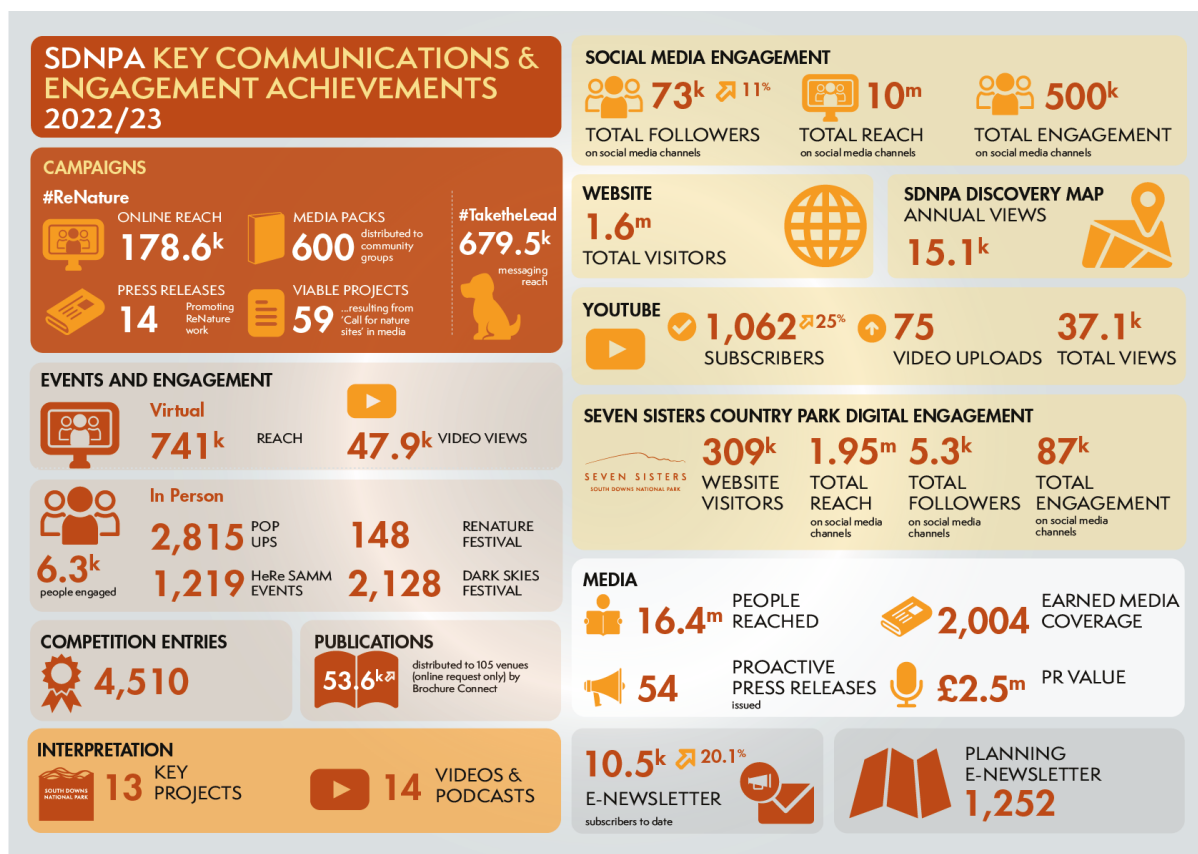


- 2.2 Our Communications & Engagement work, by its very nature, includes: carefully planned proactive work and time-sensitive, reputationally important reactive work; innovative new projects; and the vital, daily business as usual that begins and builds our relationships with our key audiences. Some of our most effective communications work is that which you never see. It includes all internal and external communications and engagement work for:
- the Authority including delivering communications for externally funded projects such as HeRe SAMM, partner projects such as Changing Chalk and projects such as the Seven Sisters Country Park Writer in Residence;
  - Seven Sisters Country Park;
  - South Downs National Park Trust;
  - National Parks England and National Parks UK; and
  - meeting the communications and engagement requirements of funding/partnership deals brokered by National Parks Partnerships.

### 3. Communications & Engagement Highlights 2022/23

- 3.1 This has been a busy and effective year for our communications and engagement work which continues to be guided by our Communications & Engagement Strategy. As we have emerged from the pandemic some communication preferences have remained, while others have continued to evolve. Our focus has been to continue to be ahead of emerging trends in how people like to communicate and consume information, while ensuring we have a skilled, flexible, creative, and innovative team that works with partners and stakeholders to deliver the representative and effective communications and engagement that are so central to the National Park going forward.
- 3.2 Figure 2 captures some of the key highlights in numbers. While it is difficult to choose a few areas to talk about, I have picked out some in addition below.

Figure 2



### 3.3 Our Campaigns

3.3.1 Our campaigns start from the premise that we need to bring people with us. This year a big focus has been on our ambitious 10-year **ReNature campaign** (launched in 2021). See launch video, 'The Night We ReNatured' [here](#):

- We ran a **hybrid Renature festival** and reached over 178,000 people with our ReNature messages and content including 10 in-person events. This included distributing **600 ReNature packs** to community groups working with our target under-represented audiences.
- We supported the **ambitious joint goal with the South Downs Trust to raise £100m in 10 years for nature recovery** by a series of high-profile press releases and PR pushes including a huge push for the Beelines subcampaign which led to over 200 pieces of media coverage including a prominent piece in *The Times*, broadcast coverage from ITV Meridian; and the Queens Jubilee focusing on a Queen's Canopy through the Trees for the Downs subcampaign which resulted in 180 pieces of coverage and the woodland survey PR which led to 187 pieces of coverage.
- We communicated the **important role that farmers play in nature recovery** with a big PR push on the success of the FiPL funding allocated by the Authority; by ensuring inclusion of South Downs National Park case studies in the NPE FiPL report aimed at Defra.
- We supported delivery led by the Nature Recovery team through further developing our **online Nature Recovery Hub** and reporting back on project successes.
- We have supported the **launch of our Green Finance Initiative** – South Downs Renature Credits to the developer/commercial market.

### 3.4 Digital highlights

3.4.1 This year our digital presence continued to grow and it now forms the basis for much of our ability to be able to innovate and try new things such as audio trails and hybrid events:

- **Using film** – both in shorts on social channels and carefully curating our YouTube channel to grow our audience by 25%.
- **Reinvigorating our interpretation** – over the year we have used storytelling to great effect on our social media channels and websites, in particular during our hybrid festivals; and out in the field where we have developed a number of key onsite projects using QR and NFC plaques.
- **Enewsletters** – Bringing news of the South Downs, our priorities, work and people to larger audiences through our enewsletters. Our monthly enewsletter subscribers grew by 20%, and our planning enewsletter allows us to show how planning is also directly delivering on our nature, climate and people goals as well as delivering on our statutory functions.
- **Using our social channels to do new things** – including a farmer takeover on Instagram as part of the ReNature festival which was watched by over 1000 people.

### 3.5 A National Park for All

3.5.1 We commit to working with and giving voice to those that we are not yet successfully representing and reaching. In the last year this included:

- celebrating **Discover National Parks Fortnight** with a competition where two young people won the chance to win a guided tour in the National Park led by experienced community walks leader Saira Niazi;
- supporting and promoting the work of two **CPRE bursary winners** Kwezia and Saira to deliver and promote their projects;
- developing and promoting **Miles Without Styles** routes;
- distributing **600 ReNature packs** to community groups working with underrepresented audiences;
- promoting and supporting our **Youth Action** work;
- supporting and promoting our **Writer in Residence**-led projects at Seven Sisters Country Park;
- celebrating **Black History Month** featuring the writing of black writers;
- promoting the value of the National Park to physical and mental **health and wellbeing**;
- branding and launching **new off-road mobility scooters at key sites** to enable access for those with disabilities;
- Highlighting **core projects** such as Echoes within the Earth an innovative dance project created by Chris Pavia an acclaimed choreographer who was the first choreographer with Downs Syndrome to make a dance piece for National Touring.

### 3.6 Supporting Income Generation

3.6.1 **South Downs Trust:** In addition to providing communications and engagement support for our own wider Marketing and Income Generation Team, within which we sit, we manage the communications for the South Downs Trust. This year this has involved managing the delivery of a new website for the Trust and co-developing and delivering the ambitious £100m ReNature campaign and its sub-campaigns, Trees for the Downs, Beelines and Pounds for Ponds. Our work this year has supported the Trust in doubling its income, from circa £800k to £1.6 million.

3.6.2 **National Park Partnerships:** We support the income generation partnership deals delivered by National Park Partnerships. This year this has involved delivering communications and engagement activity to support the BMW and Estee Lauder partnerships. This summer this led us being able to feature our Nature Recovery and Biodiversity Officer Jan Knowlson in Vogue – a new and interesting departure for us.

3.6.3 **Seven Sisters Country Park:** We lead on all communications and engagement for Seven Sisters Country Park. After creating their brand, website, social media channels, signage and visitor centre interpretation, in the last year we have focused on growing their digital audience, promoting events on the site, delivering new interpretation and the Writer in Residence based there.

#### 4. **Our Public affairs work**

4.1 Our Public Affairs work is a key part of our wider Communications & Engagement work, but sits separately from the Communications and Engagement Strategy. It is one of the ways by which we can achieve the large-scale objectives of the PMP, Local Plan and CP by influencing policy, practice and public opinion. It sets out to:

- ensure a coordinated and targeted approach to our public affairs work to enable the Authority to influence policy and decision making on agreed strategic issues affecting the National Park;
- identify the key public affairs issues that we will proactively work on over the next two years; and
- set out guiding principles for how we can effectively and quickly deal with emerging issues so that the Authority can respond to challenges and be ready to grasp opportunities.

4.2 In addition to monitoring the external policy environment and looking for opportunities where we can influence policy, practice and opinion on key issues affecting the National Park. Our Public Affairs Strategy focuses on two key areas with specific objectives. It is important to note that our public affairs objectives are not our only or most pressing priorities – they are priority areas where we have the greatest ability to influence and where there is most pressing need or opportunity for change to happen. Our current two-year objectives were agreed by NPA in October 2022 and are grouped under two headings, Nature & Climate and a National Park for All.

#### 4.3 **Nature & Climate Objectives**

- All local authorities in in the SDNP to sign up to Race to Zero to ensure a common framework to work collectively towards net zero.
- All local authorities to manage their assets to work towards 33% of land managed for nature by 2030.
- Ensure the three Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) covering the National Park are fit for purpose for the National Park.
- All local authorities to work in partnership with the SDNPA to deliver nature recovery through the planning system using all available mechanisms including biodiversity net gain.
- SDNP to develop a campaign to enable everyone to play their part in climate action.

#### 4.4 **Nature & Climate: How have we done?**

- We convene the UK National Park Climate Change & Energy Group which develops and updates the national delivery plan for Climate Leadership.
- We are leading on the Innovate UK climate project using the One Planet platform to test approaches and demonstrated effective climate action delivery. We are currently working on developing a Phase 2 bid to scale this up for UK wide National Park roll out.

- Helping to develop the UK National Parks' response to Race to Zero and are ensuring that we comply with the carbon monitoring and reporting requirements of the programme.
- Contributing to the development of national-level practice on climate change and net zero. Our Climate Lead will now spend 50% of his time (funded by the new Protected Landscapes Partnership) on the development of a shared baseline and methodology for monitoring progress towards net zero and piloting it to roll out across all National Parks.
- We have continued to develop and promote our ReNature Campaign and sub campaigns Trees for the Downs, Beelines and launched this summer, Pounds for Ponds.
- In our work to change public opinion and drive positive changes to policy and practice, we have developed 14 press releases on nature and climate issues with an estimated PR value of £1.4m.
- Through our ReNature Credits we are working with landowners and neighbouring local authorities to ensure that the new off-set (carbon) and compliant markets (BNG, Nitrates and Phosphates) benefit large-scale nature recovery, in line with our plans and those set out in the local nature recovery strategies.
- We have been involved with action by several LAs including BHCC, Lewes & Eastbourne, Worthing & Adur, Arun, east Hampshire to manage their assets to work towards 33% of land managed for nature by 2030.
- Proactively engaged with the LNRSs development with the three Responsible Authorities: Hampshire County Council, West Sussex County Council and East Sussex County Council with Brighton & Hove City Council. Directors continue to have ongoing meetings with high-level equivalents in WSCC and ESCC.
- Work on net gain is underway and working with local planning authority partners is part of the BNG Readiness paper that is being led by the Planning Policy Team. We are working also working with Arun and East Hampshire District Councils.
- Manage and allocate Farming in Protected Landscape (FiPL) through the Local Advisory Panel.
- Regular meetings held with both Natural England and the Environment Agency at Regional Director level.

#### 4.5 **A National Park for All Objectives**

- The SDNP, authorities, parishes and communities in the National Park to actively manage their greenspaces:
  - to improve access for all;
  - to provide greater opportunity for connection to nature;
  - for all to discover and enjoy the National Park.
- Authorities and parishes to ensure their urban green spaces link into the National Park to provide opportunities for nature recovery, access and health and wellbeing.
- All local authorities to use all mechanisms, including Community infrastructure Levy (CIL), to deliver better access and opportunities for connection with nature to all.
- The SDNPA to use its ReNature campaign to raise awareness of the need for nature recovery and to enable everyone to play their part.

#### 4.6 **A National Park for All: How have we done?**

- One of the main mechanisms we chose for supporting communities to take action for improving how their green spaces used to support nature and people, was to promote the Sussex LNP Green Spaces toolkit. The project to develop the toolkit was jointly funded by us and East Sussex County Council. In October we presented the toolkit to parishes at our three county-based parish meetings
- A key reason for taking on Seven Sisters Country Park is that we are able to demonstrate best practice and we have been working hard to show just how effective and welcoming to all that green space can be:
  - We received extra funding from Defra to make off-road mobility scooters available at key sites including Seven Sisters Country Park, to better enable access of the green space and have promoted this widely.
  - We have worked with the Writer in Residence Alinah Azadeh in her project to empower and support writers of colour in their journey to write inspired by the Seven Sisters and surrounding Heritage Coast.
  - We have developed an audio trail for those with visual impairments.
- In our work to change public opinion and drive positive changes to policy and practice, we have developed 24 press releases with an estimated PR value of £1.1m.
- We continue to operate on a national level. A key example of this is the Generation Green project where we have helped to create and deliver a wide external partnership based on our project-delivery experience here in the South Downs National Park.

#### 4.7 **Opportunity knocks**

- 4.7.1 As mentioned in paragraph 4.1, our public affairs must be able to react to the external environment, an external environment that continues to change rapidly post-pandemic. This opportunistic work can pay real dividends and, at other times, can be crowded out by competing issues.
- 4.7.2 In November, the Chief Executive drafted a letter on the funding crisis facing National Parks which we managed to get published in *The Guardian*. This led to a debate in the House of Lords on National Park funding in January this year following on from a question tabled by the Earl of Clancarty who stated that he was moved to do so following on from Trevor's letter.
- 4.7.3 Authority Member Maggie Jones has played an important role in supporting our public affairs work as a member of the House of Lords, on issues such as expansion of the Section 62 duty on public bodies.
- 4.7.4 The Authority attended the Parliamentary Reception for The Friends of the South Downs in support of our messages. This was well attended by local MPs who were a ready audience for the PA messages from the SDNPA team.
- 4.7.5 As the newly elected Deputy Chair of National Parks England (NPE), Authority Chair Vanessa Rowlands took part in a meeting with the Secretary of State in June under the auspices of NPE.
- 4.7.6 We are currently developing a non-political SDNPA manifesto in preparation for the next general election to ensure that all parties have the environment and National Parks high on their agendas.
- 4.7.7 We are also developing plans for our own national South Downs Summit on green finance which will take place in February 2024. The Secretary of State has been invited and given a choice of dates, which will inform a paper which will go to the October NPA.

#### 5. **What is coming up?**

- 5.1 **Some key priorities for our communications and engagement work over the next year:**

- Delivering on the priorities of the Corporate Plan – nature, climate and NP4All (to include all of our people work, including communities)
- Voice programme to ensure our platforms are welcoming and inclusive of everyone.
- A hybrid events and engagement programme including our ReNature Festival (22-30 July) and our Dark Skies Festival in February 2024.
- Launch of digital hubs including an Accessibility and Walking Hub which will be launched in later July, and a Communities and Climate Change hubs which will be launched later in the year.
- PR focus on Corp Plan and public affairs priorities, and to provide proactive and robust PR on planning function, and to build reputation of SDNPA and Trust.
- Our theme this year for our events and engagement programme is “Taking Action for Nature and Climate.”
- Supporting our income generation.

## 5.2 Some of the key priorities for our public affairs work include:

- Finalising and sharing our manifesto in the lead up to the general election.
- Delivering the South Downs Summit on green finance in February 2024.
- Influencing the development of our Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
- Supporting the South Downs Partnership to play an active role in delivering our public affairs objectives through their networks.
- Playing an active role in the development of the Protected Landscape Partnership through NPE and our direct liaison with Defra.

## 6. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	No. The communications and engagement and public affairs work is funded through our core budget.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Our communications and engagement and public affairs work seeks to maximise our resources and work smartly with partners to achieve our objectives.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	Our communications and engagement and public affairs work supports delivery of all of our PMP Outcomes and Corporate Plan objectives.
Links to other projects or partner organisations	N/A
How does this decision contribute to the Authority’s climate change objectives	One of the key areas of work for us going forward is creating a climate change digital hub and supporting climate change projects. Our Public Affairs Strategy has climate and nature as one of its two key objectives.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the	N/A



<b>Implication</b>	<b>Yes*/No</b>
proposal?	
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Yes. Our communications and engagement strategy focuses our communications and engagement work at those currently underrepresented and underserved.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	None
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	None
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	None
Are there any Data Protection implications?	None
<p>Are there any Sustainability implications based on the 5 principles set out in the SDNPA Sustainability Strategy?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Living within environmental limits</li> <li>2. Ensuring a strong healthy and just society</li> <li>3. Achieving a sustainable economy</li> <li>4. Promoting good governance</li> <li>5. Using sound science responsibly</li> </ol>	None

### **Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision**

6.1 As this is an update report there are no risks associated with a decision.

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SDNPA Consultees Chief Executive; Director of Countryside Policy and Management;  
Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer;  
Legal Services,  
External Consultees None  
Background Documents [Communications-and-Engagement-Strategy-2020-external.pdf](#)  
([southdowns.gov.uk](#))  
[FINAL-SDNP-Public-Affairs-Strategy-2022-24.pdf](#)  
([southdowns.gov.uk](#))