

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**  
Date **11 July 2023**  
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 30 March 2023.

**2. Member Activity**

2.1 Members had a strategic day out in the Park visiting the Westerlands estate near Petworth in April to hear about the estates activities and plans for the future as they start the Whole Estate Plan process. It was fascinating to hear the plans a family had for their estate as they move away from intensive horse grazing to plans to restore nature and create more access. This was very much the start of their WEP process.

2.2 Melanie Hunt, Chair of the P&R committee, led the members of that group through a process of reviewing the terms of reference of their work on a P&R “away” day. The day started with the Committee considering how well it had fulfilled its’ Terms of Reference over the past 12 months and, through a RAG rating process, identifying what it did well and areas for future improvement. This was a very positive exercise and enabled the Committee to focus in on any areas of concern. Discussions were then had around the effectiveness of Committee Meetings, Risk Meetings, Papers, Workshops and WEP Visits; also about how the Committee contributed to the effectiveness of the wider Authority.

2.3 The All Members Strategic Day held in May focused on Planning, taking a look at built out developments across the Park, approved by the planning committee to see & learn what had worked well and what could be improved. The round up discussion and notes taken at the end of the day will feed into the local plan process which starts later this year.

**3. South Downs Partnership**

3.1 Our partnership board met virtually in May to hear from Rose O’Neill from Campaign for National Parks about the work they do which is complementary to the National Park Authorities across the UK. As a campaigning organisation they can be active in places the authorities can’t. For example, the work they are doing in advocating for strengthened powers for Protected Landscapes through amendments to the Levelling Up Bill, which is going through Parliament in this session. The board also got to hear what CNP would like to see in Party manifestos at the next General Election, when Rose talked through their priorities, most of which are aligned to our goals.

3.2 The next Partnership meeting will take place in July and will focus on the work the Authority is doing on Climate Action.

**4. Chair Activity**

4.1 Since our last meeting I have been pleased to attend the **Stanmer Park Restoration Project Celebration Event** at One Garden Brighton celebrating the wonderful work that Plumpton college have overseen in the restoration of the walled garden at Stanmer Park and which was supported with CIL funding. The work also won our South Downs Award at the Sussex Heritage awards in 2022.

4.2 I also represented the Authority at the launch of the new **Sussex Wine Tourism Growth Plan** in Parliament in June. Some of the vineyards based in the National Park were present, including Wiston, Ashling Park, Rathfinny and Ridgeview. Rathfinny were also celebrating being a certified as a B Corp company and Ridgeview have recently been awarded a Gold in our new Green South Downs Sustainability accreditation.

4.3 The **Friends of the South Downs** are celebrating their centenary this year and their president Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, our own member Maggie Jones, hosted an event in Parliament in June to mark the occasion. Trevor Beattie gave a wonderful speech praising the foresight of Society of Sussex Downsmen who bought a part of the Downs, the Crowlink Estate, East Sussex, in 1926 to save it from development. Thus began the long campaign to designate the whole of the South Downs as an ultimate special place, a National Park. Many of the South Downs’ MPs were present and it was especially nice to see our ex-Chair, Margaret Parnell there. There is a fantastic book, *A Centenary History of the Friends of the South Downs*, published by the Friends, telling the story and is well worth reading.

**5. National Parks England**

5.1 National Parks England held it’s AGM and board meeting on 8 June in London. Neil Heseltine, Chair of the Yorkshire Dales was elected as the new chair of the organisation with myself, Vanessa Rowlands, as Deputy.

5.2 Agreed at the meeting were the new business plan and a document of “Key Asks”, a National Parks mini-manifesto, to be used when speaking to politicians and influencers. This draws on a similar process that is underway in SDNPA, which will be brought to the October NPA. I attach both to this report as appendices 1 and 2.

5.3 NPE have also recently published report of the second year of Farming in Protected Landscapes in conjunction with NAAONB, attached as appendix 3

**6. Departing Members**

6.1 I would like to express our thanks to a couple of members who are not returning after outcomes from May local elections. Thanks to Henry Potter who was Chichester DC’s member on the Authority for 4 years and Richard Waring, who was one of the members sent to the Authority by the parishes of East Sussex.

**7. 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 Business Plan 2023/24

	2. National Parks England Key Asks
	3. National Parks England FiPL Year 2 update
SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive; Head of Governance.
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	None

