

Agenda Item 7
Report NPA23/24-10

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**
Date **19 October 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 11 July 2023.

2. Update

Member Activity

- 2.1 The Authority saw 10 new members join this summer and the Governance team have put on a series of **induction days** to welcome and support these members. The first of these took place at the beginning of July so new members were ready for the NPA and committee meetings that took place that month.
- 2.2 The beginning of September saw the second induction day, based in Petersfield. The Planning and Countryside Policy teams took us on a series of walks and trips across Hampshire to highlight key issues for the Authority such as Market towns and their needs, Farm clusters and FiPL, Public Rights of Way and National Nature Reserves and National Park for All. It was an excellent showcase of the work the Authority are doing across the Park.
- 2.3 Thank you to all the officers for putting on such an informative and well-organised day and to members for making the time to attend these important sessions.
- 2.4 A **Strategic Direction Day** for all members took place on 28th September at Seven Sisters Country Park. The morning session was a chance for members to discuss & debate policies, outcomes and topics that we felt were important for deeper consideration across workshops in the forthcoming year. It was a lively session, full of positive energy for delivering the Authority's vision and the focus on the corporate priorities.
- 2.5 The afternoon was spent understanding the Seven Sisters site and the work that's taken place over the summer. The team there, headed up by new Park manager Claire Onslow, gave us two tours across the site. Lawrence Leather, an ex-co-optee member of P&R committee, but now temporary ranger at SSCP, gave us a guided tour of the land management and we were fortunate, on route, to witness an osprey defending itself against several rooks. Richard Ayres, the events manager, showed us around the visitors' centre and the rest of the facilities at the Exceat site.

Parish Workshops

- 2.6 Our second parish workshop of the year was held on 4th October. The well organised, virtual event attracted over 70 councillors from parish councils across the park. After introductions from the parish members, the parishes were given updates on planning matters and countryside management from Tim Slaney and Nick Heasman. The rest of the event was given over to a 40-minute Q&A where questions ranged from nature restoration at Woolbeding, the new Rampion windfarm, water neutrality and Dark Night Skies.

Cultural Heritage

- 2.7 The Eastern end of the Park saw two new art launches in September. Charleston Trust, who manage Charleston Farmhouse, home of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, opened a second space, Charleston Lewes, in the old home of Lewes District Council, Southover House, conveniently located close to the train station. The old office building has been stripped of its bright corporate interior to reveal beautiful brick arches and its original flooring.
- 2.8 Having a space in the heart of Lewes town, Charleston are hoping to be able to connect to more young and diverse audience who struggled to get to the house in Firlie and to encourage visitors from further afield to arrive by train.
- 2.9 Towner Eastbourne launched the 2023 Turner Prize exhibition at the end of September, showing works by the four shortlisted artists this year are Jesse Darling, Ghislaine Leung, Rory Pilgrim and Barbara Walker. The Turner Prize is a must see of contemporary conceptual art and always provokes good debate. Towner itself has undergone an upgrade with a new restaurant and is energising the town through its Eastbourne Alive campaign. The Awards ceremony itself, will take place in the Winter Gardens next door at the end of the year and is seen as the start of a town regeneration, boosted by money from the Levelling Up fund.
- 2.10 Visitors to both art galleries can now carry on their cultural explorations by using the recently launched Sussex Art Shuttle, which travels to & from Lewes and Eastbourne. On route it stops at Seven Sisters Country Park, Alfriston and Charleston Farmhouse.
- 2.11 South Downs National Park Authority has partnered with Towner Eastbourne, Charleston and Sussex Modern to create this pilot service. The bus is running on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays until the end of the year. Hopefully this pilot will be successful in encouraging more sustainable travel in the area and that it can continue next year.

National Parks UK

- 2.12 The annual Chair's forum took place in the Lake District on 21st & 22nd September. Chairs and CEOs from the 15 UK National Parks gathered to exchange learning and renew commitments to work together on the key issues of Nature Recovery and Climate.
- 2.13 The main item on the agenda was getting commitment from all 15 UK National Parks to collectively sign up to Race to Zero. Race to Zero is the United Nations-backed global climate leadership initiative rallying non-state actors (like cities, local authorities, businesses, universities) to take rigorous and immediate action to halve global emissions by 2030 and deliver a healthier, fairer zero carbon world.
- 2.14 South Downs NPA has been leading the way with our Climate Action Plan approved in March 2020 and in acting as the convenor for the UK National Park Climate Change and Energy Group. At the September 2023 P&R committee meeting, members endorsed the SDNPA signing up to Race to Zero and working with the other 14 UK National Parks.
- 2.15 It was with great satisfaction, that by the end of the forum, it was confirmed that eleven of the fifteen UK national parks have now met the membership criteria, with the rest having plans to achieve this by the end of the year.
- 2.16 The overwhelming view across the NPAs was that, as nationally designated landscape authorities, we want to provide clear Climate Leadership for our communities, and the Country, by delivering Net Zero with Nature.

- 2.17 The Forum finished with a field trip to visit Goldrill Beck, where the river had been restored to its natural flood plain. The villages lower downstream had suffered catastrophic flooding after Storm Desmond in 2015, through this work, undertaken in 2021, the flow has been slowed down by 3 hours, massively reducing the flood risk to the communities. The tenant farmer on site had recently benefited from some FiPL funding that had enabled business diversification into holiday lodges.
- 2.18 We saw more evidence of FiPL funds at work at Gowbarrow Hall Farm, where the farmers have switched to regenerative farming methods, replacing sheep with cattle, horses, and pigs. The FiPL money was used to convert a derelict barn into an education and catering space.

3. 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	None
SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive; Head of Governance.
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	None

