

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 21 SEPTEMBER 2023

Held at the Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre, Midhurst at 1.00pm

Present: Annie Brown, Tim Burr, Peter Diplock, Mark Fairweather, Theresa Fowler, Joan Grech, Melanie Hunt, Jerry Pett and Steven Ridgeon.

Co-opted Member of the Committee: Morris Findley

Independent Member of the Committee: Catriona Aves

SDNPA Officers: Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Tim Slaney (Director of Planning), Chris Fairbrother (Strategy Lead – Climate Change and Net-Zero), Liz Gent (Project Management Lead), Rebecca Osborne (Procurement Officer), Nigel Manvell (Chief Finance Officer), Lynne Govus (Head of Finance and Corporate Services), Richard Sandiford (Head of Governance), Louise Read (Monitoring Officer) and Jane Roberts (Committee Officer).

OPENING REMARKS

64. The Chair opened the meeting.

65. The Chair welcomed all those present and stated that:

- The meeting was being webcast by the Authority and would be available for subsequent on-line viewing. Anyone entering the meeting was considered to have given consent to be filmed or recorded, and for the possible use of images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purpose.
- SDNPA Members had a primary responsibility for ensuring that the Authority furthers 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.

66. Within the opening remarks the Chair:

- Advised Members there would be no internal audit report brought to this committee meeting, all medium and high risk actions due had been implemented, and no further work had been undertaken since the July meeting of the Committee.

ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

67. Apologies were received from OlaOlu Adedayo, Tom Fourcade and Maggie Jones.

ITEM 2: ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIR

68. Only one nomination for the position of Deputy Chair of the Committee had been received. It was declared that Steven Ridgeon was duly elected as a Deputy Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee until the Authority AGM in 2024. The Chair congratulated Steven on his appointment.

ITEM 3: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

69. There were no declarations of interest.

ITEM 4: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 20 JULY 2023

70. The Chair reported that revised minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 20 July 2023 had been tabled. Members received the revised minutes and approved their accuracy. The tabled minutes were signed as an accurate record of that meeting.

ITEM 5: UPDATES ON PREVIOUS COMMITTEE DECISIONS

71. The expected announcements from Defra on National Parks had been postponed. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) would receive its third reading in the House of Lords on 21 September 2023. The proposed Nutrient Neutrality amendment had now been removed from the Bill, but may return through a different legislative route.
72. The proposed Government amendment to LURB on National Parks had now been published with a strengthened Section 62 of the 1995 Environment Act, requiring public bodies to 'seek to further National Park Purposes' from the current 'have regard to'. It also added the requirement that management plans in National Parks could be required to address any aspect of the Environment Act that the Government so chooses.
73. The Authority was awaiting an announcement on the Protected Landscapes Partnerships, the Defra response to the Glover Report and new guidance on how National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty construct their management plans.

ITEM 6: URGENT MATTERS

74. There were none.

ITEM 7: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

75. There were none.

ITEM 8: NEED FOR PART II EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

76. There was no requirement to consider any item in private session.

ITEM 9: SDNPA CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRAMME: UPDATE ON THE UK PARKS 'RACE TO ZERO' APPLICATION

77. The Strategy Lead – Climate Change and Net-Zero introduced report PR23/24-13 and reminded Members of the report contents.
78. The Committee commented that:
 - Was there any resource for local communities to find best practice?
 - Would there be anything that visitors could take home with them to influence their behaviour, so they could practice what we preach on net zero?
 - Targets and speed must be commensurate with the partners the Authority worked with.
 - Winchester City Council (WCC) declared a climate change emergency some time ago. It recently declared a nature emergency. Keen to see closer collaboration between WCC and the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA).
 - Would like a stronger conclusion to the paper with a recommendation to endorse the direction of the SDNPA's collaboration.
 - The Chair thanked the Officer for their leadership and hard work in this area.
79. Members were advised:
 - A Climate Emergency Fund had been set up in 2020 by the SDNPA to help support local climate action networks and community projects for the past 2-3 years. Climate Action was now a priority within the Corporate Plan with a specific budget to support local communities in this area.
 - Takeaways for visitors to the Park could be related to the interactions they have with sustainable businesses and how they travel around the Park.
 - The Authority was doing a lot of work to facilitate collaborative working, including the use of shared technical platforms. WCC already invested with the SDNPA through the

new Carbon Trading Platform. The Ouse Valley Climate Action Project was a great example of collaborative community action, and the upcoming Local Plan review would be a key opportunity to further this work.

80. It was proposed, seconded and agreed to amend the recommendation from “The Committee received and considered an update on the SDNPA’s collaboration with the UK National Park family on Climate Leadership” to the revised recommendation “The Committee is recommended to endorse the direction of the SDNPA’s collaboration with the UK National Park family on Climate Leadership”.
81. **RESOLVED:** The Committee endorsed the direction of the SDNPA’s collaboration with the UK National Park family on Climate Leadership.

ITEM 10: QI CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24

82. The Director of Countryside Policy and Management introduced report PR23/24-14 and reminded members of the report content.
83. The Committee commented that:
- Had the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) fund been extended?
 - What was being done to broaden the offer to those from ethnic minority backgrounds within National Parks for All?
 - Pleased to note Brighton & Hove had appointed a Downland Estate Manager to implement the Whole Estate Plan (WEP).
 - Why was there no SDNPA representation at the Boomtown Festival this year?
 - Was there a way of measuring the health of footpath network in general?
 - The number of social media account followers could have been double counted if they followed all SDNPA accounts.
 - Seven Sisters County Park (SSCP) cottages and campsite were scheduled to open in Quarter 3. Was there any update?
 - How many people were there living in the South Downs National Park (SDNP)?
 - The external auditor had previously agreed the accounts report would be delivered to the Policy & Resources Committee in February 2024 and the final audit report delivered to the Policy & Resources Committee in June 2024. Had there been any change to this?
 - The new reporting format made it easier to review the detail of the report.
 - Biannual reporting should be endorsed in principle, however if there was a subject that could easily be reported quarterly, it should be presented quarterly.
 - What was meant by subject to approval of detailed reporting schedule?
 - Was there scope for an annual deep dive into reports?
84. Members were advised:
- FIPL had been extended into 2024/25.
 - National Parks for All reported on activities rather than targeting specific participants The ‘Writing Our Legacy’ work was focused on Black, Asian and ethnic minority artists. It was important how this was monitored without being intrusive to measure progress.
 - There was no SDNPA representation at Boomtown Festival this year due to a planning application being in process. Going forward, if appropriate permission was obtained, the SDNPA would likely attend.

- The Authority had detailed monitoring of the South Downs Way and projects it was involved in. There was monitoring of the wider Rights of Way network through the Highways Authorities' mechanisms; the SDNPA did not manage the Rights of Way network.
- The South Downs Commercial Operations Ltd Board was due to meet on 22 September to discuss the opening of the SSCP cottages and campsite. Completion was slightly behind schedule. A new SSCP manager would be starting the week beginning 25 September 2023. A phased opening was proposed of the cottages, followed by the camping barn, with completion scheduled for the season March/April 2024.
- There were over 110,000 people living in the SDNP, the highest of any National Park.
- The Head of Governance had been in contact with the external auditor and discussions would continue on the reporting schedule.
- A detailed reporting schedule would be presented at the next P&R meeting, alongside the Q2 performance report, setting out what would be reported on a quarterly, biannual and annual basis, for committee approval.
- There was scope for an annual deep dive into reports, but the format was yet to be determined and may depend on the subject matter. There was a schedule to ensure that all subject areas were covered. There was also a report delivered every 5 years to report on the state of the SDNP overall which would lead into the next Partnership Management Plan.

85. **RESOLVED:** The Committee:

1. Received and considered the Q1 Corporate Performance and Projects Report 2023/24.
2. Endorsed the principle of biannual Corporate Performance reporting, subject to the approval of a detailed reporting schedule at the next meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee

ITEM 11: REVIEW OF SDNPA PROCUREMENT STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

86. The Head of Finance and Corporate Services introduced report PR23/24-15 and reminded members of the report content.

87. The Committee commented that:

- The Committee Chair had worked with the team in a procurement exercise, and it was working well in practice. It was good to see how social value had been included. The procurement process could help the SDNPA achieve many of its goals, and it was good to see the inclusion of South Downs businesses.

88. **RESOLVED:** The Committee:

1. Noted progress against the Procurement Strategy Action Plan during Years 1 and 2
2. Approved the revised Procurement Strategy Action Plan Year 3 for Sept 2023-Sept 2024.

ITEM 12: SEVEN SISTERS SEWAGE SYSTEM CAPITAL WORKS PROJECT PROCUREMENT

89. The Project Management Lead introduced report PR23/24-16 and reminded members of the report content.

90. The Committee commented that:

- Had there been a risk assessment of the sewage system prior to the acquisition of the site from East Sussex County Council (ESCC). What lessons could have been learned from this?

- If the site was currently not fit for purpose, was the Authority polluting the area at present, and was the Authority at risk of fines?
- How long would it be before the new permit was in place?
- Could the contract be procured in advance of the permit?
- The Bed & Breakfast (B&B) on the site was privately owned, did they make any contribution to the cost of processing the sewage and would they be expected to contribute to the replacement system?

91. Members were advised:

- A risk assessment had been completed as part of the transfer of site from ESCC. There were clauses in the transfer that prohibited certain issues from being raised with ESCC after the transfer. It was identified that at some point the work would be required with an outline cost of £100k. Members had noted that costs may be higher than estimated in the risk register. This had been a particularly unusual transfer with another public body and the reed bed issue had been discussed.
- Solids were being captured in the reed bed, It was only during periods of extreme use that biological oxygen and ammonia levels risked exceeding the levels allowed by the permit. It was not functioning at peak efficiency and there could be a smell. SSCP had been completely transparent with the Environment Agency and had been working with them to resolve.
- An application to vary the permit had been submitted in May 2023. Confirmation was received in July 2023 that the application had been received. There would be a wait of 153 days for a case officer to be assigned but given positive action by the Authority it was clear we were doing all we could to resolve the situation.
- The Environment Agency permit was needed before the system went live but was not needed for the construction phase, and SSCP already had a permit in place. The Authority had applied for a variation to improve capacity.
- The B&B paid a contribution towards the septic tank being emptied within their utilities bill, but as a tenant would not contribute towards the overall cost of the project.

92. **RESOLVED:** The Committee:

1. Noted the current status of the Seven Sisters Country Park Sewage System Capital Works project;
2. Noted the outline cost of £300,000 to fund the required capital works from the Invest to Save reserve;
3. Approved the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor to undertake the required works to install a new Sewage Treatment System at Seven Sisters Country Park; and
4. Delegated authority to the Chief Executive to award the contract following a competitive process as described in this report subject to the receipt of the necessary permits and consents.

ITEM 13: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

93. The Head of Governance introduced report PR23/24-17 and reminded Members of the report content.

94. The Committee commented that:

- Was Green Finance sufficiently well-developed that it could be included as a mitigation on income generation?

- Was the Seven Sisters project plan and business plan included in mitigations because it could break even but could not make a profit. Could this be expounded in future reporting.
 - The inherent risk was shown in the wrong box on the risk graph for Risk 29 (Direct Action Urgent Works at the Angel Inn and the Tuck Shop, North Street, Midhurst).
95. Members were advised:
- Green Financing was well developed, but was not generic income that could be used across the Authority. Any income was ringfenced to be spent on the specific sites that generated the funds and to fund the monitoring costs associated with them. It should be included in the Risk Register going forward.
 - The annual business plan, which is approved by the Authority, was an important part of the SDNPA's control framework and relationship with South Downs Commercial Operations Ltd.
 - The inherent risk graph would be amended for Risk 29.
96. **RESOLVED:** The Committee received and considered the Corporate Risk Register as of September 2023.

ITEM 14: BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2023/24: MONTH 4

97. The Chief Finance Officer introduced report PR23/24-18 and reminded Members of the report content.
98. The Committee commented that:
- The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) reserve was larger than the other reserves combined.
 - Was the slow spending of the CIL fund normal?
 - How long did it normally take to obtain listed building consent for cladding?
99. Members were advised:
- The CIL reserve was large and the Authority would be looking at where there had been significant delays or no expenditure and why. The upcoming CIL Workshop would be an opportunity to examine this and all Members were invited to attend.
 - The CIL spend would normally pick up in the later part of the financial year.
 - Listed building consent took on average 8-10 weeks. 13 October was the scheduled date for the application to be put in. Surveys were currently being undertaken after which the tender process would commence.
100. **RESOLVED:** The Committee:
1. Noted the 2023/24 Revenue Forecast position as at month 4 of a net (12,000) below budget variance.
 2. Noted the 2023/24 Capital Forecast position as at month 4 of a zero-budget variance.
 3. Noted the Reserves position as at month 4, as set out at Appendix 3.
 4. Noted the Treasury Management overview and position as at month 4, as set out at Appendix 4.
101. The meeting closed at 2.32pm.

CHAIR