

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**
Date **12 December 2023**
By **Director of Countryside Policy & Management**
Title of Report **Key Asks for General Election**
Decision

Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to:

- 1. Approve the five Revised Key Asks set out in this paper and Appendix 1;**
 - 2. Approve the use of the Key Asks and surrounding narrative as the basis for SDNPA advocacy work ahead of the next General Election.**
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 In anticipation of a General Election campaign in 2024/5, this paper sets out a series of five Key Asks related to the South Downs National Park.
- 1.2 These five Key Asks were presented to the NPA in October 2023 and have been updated given Member feedback provided at this meeting. These revised asks are set out in Appendix 1.
- 1.3 If agreed by the NPA, these asks will provide a point of reference for all interactions by Members, Officers and volunteers with prospective candidates and at hustings in the lead up to the Election, in effect providing the elevator test. They apply equally to any prospective candidate from all political parties.
- 1.4 The asks have been created by taking account of national issues and the work of NPE but tailoring these to the SDNPA context. They are also informed by the work the Campaign for National Parks is doing on its Call to Action. The South Downs Partnership is developing its own election asks.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 The policy context in which National Parks in general (and the SDNP in particular) is changing rapidly and is very different to that prior to the last election. The Glover Review, the flat cash funding settlement, the establishment of the new Protected Landscapes Partnership and now the Government amendment to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill to strengthen the duty set out in section 62 of the Environment Act 1995 from “have regard to” to “seek to further” are all relevant. So are the wider policy debates about the expectations of PLs in nature recovery (contributing to 30 by 30) and Net Zero, which it is expected will soon be made explicit in the draft guidance on National Park/Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans and the Outcomes Framework. These were referred to in the package of announcements launched by Defra ahead of COP28.
- 2.2 There is an expectation that English National Park Authorities should take a leading role in improving nature, climate, people and place within their landscapes. This is hugely welcome, but with that high level of ambition comes the need for the tools to do the job well. Resources are tight, we are small organisations and at present we have few direct levers

other than use of the planning system. The COP28 announcements only include short-term capital funding and do not improve the core funding settlement.

- 2.3 The revised five asks set out below would therefore allow the SDNPA to work much more effectively with local partners and communities to improve this special landscape. They do not create significant extra burdens for the taxpayer, rather they are about doing things better, achieving more synergy between public bodies who work inside National Parks, and more collective impact for public expenditure.
- 2.4 An aide memoire card of these key asks and our wider Public Affairs Objectives will be provided to all Members and officers for interactions with policy makers and prospective candidates from all political parties (see **Appendix 3**)

3. Issues for consideration

- 3.1 The revised five key asks set out in **Appendix 1**, along with reasoning in support of them, are:
- 3.2 Cement the SDNPA's role in giving advice and support to farmers and land managers in the National Park to restore nature, cut carbon and welcome people alongside more sustainable food production.
- 3.3 Grant National Parks a general power of competence to be commercially innovative, generate income and work beyond their boundaries.
- 3.4 Transfer responsibility and resources for publicly owned National Nature Reserves within the National Park to the SDNPA to maximise nature recovery and access opportunities.
- 3.5 Increase the role of nature in delivering health and wellbeing to underserved groups by piloting the investment of a proportion of the Public Health Budget in Hampshire and Sussex in increasing the capacity of community projects in and around the National Park.
- 3.6 Make the polluter pay by ringfencing a proportion of the penalties levied on polluters in and around the National Park (e.g. water companies) to be reinvested in projects that restore and strengthen its ecosystems.

4. Options & cost implications

- 4.1 This work sits alongside the advocacy work of a number of other organisations. Locally, the South Downs Partnership meets this month to draw up its own list of asks, and the South Downs Network (an affiliation of conservation, access and heritage groups) is also drawing up its own manifesto. Nationally, the Campaign for National Parks has published its own Call for Action with the following headlines:
 - Rapid nature recovery of National Parks
 - Give National Parks back to the nation
 - A new deal for National Parks

This is attached as **Appendix 2**

- 4.2 There are no immediate cost implications of approving the Key Asks other than the officer time to design up the final version and the costs of any hard copy (e.g. a pledge card). Advocacy on these issues will form part of our ongoing public affairs work.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 Once the set of key asks is agreed, the aide memoire card will be produced for all Members, staff and volunteers to use. The aim is to ensure that the South Downs National Park (and National Parks in general) are front of mind for all prospective candidates in this part of Southern England. This will be best achieved by their use at as many as possible of the hustings for constituencies in and around the SDNP.

6. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	See point 4 above
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	The Key Asks will allow the SDNPA to be more efficient and effective in its advocacy work pre-election.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	The Key Asks will help to further all aspects of the SDNPA Corporate Plan in particular on Nature Recovery, Climate Action, National Park for All, and Rural Economy.
Links to other projects or partner organisations	See above: Campaign for National Parks, the South Downs Partnership, the South Downs Network.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	By strengthening SDNPA's ability to work with landowners and to innovate and share best practice outside the NP boundary.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	None
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Yes. In particular, the ask around health & wellbeing would bring direct benefits to many underrepresented groups in and around the NP.
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

7. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
SDNPA seen as campaigning and/or overtly party political	2	3	The Key Asks are non-party-political and would apply equally to any prospective candidate

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Appendices
1. Key Asks
2. CNP Call for Action
3. Draft Card
Internal Consultees: SDNPA Consultees; Chief Executive; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services,
External Consultees: None
Background Documents: None