

Agenda Item 7
Report NPA23/24-23

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**
Date **28 March 2024**
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 12 December 2023.

2. Update

Member Workshops

- 2.1 There have been a series of workshops for Members since January, the first of which was on the budget setting for this next financial year. Thank you to Lynn Govus and the team for such a clear set of presentations. This workshop helped inform the budget setting for this March NPA meeting.
- 2.2 This was followed by a session on Climate Action and working with some of our key partners, the local authorities in the Park. The objective of the workshop was to understand where our local authority partners were on their journey to Net Zero targets. Sharing policies and projects created a space for cross learning. Thank you to all our Local Authority members and their officers for contributing to the meeting.
- 2.3 The session included a presentation from One Planet <https://oneplanet.com> and how SDNPA have been using the platform to map climate action activity first as part of the Ouse Valley CARES (Climate Action, Resilient Ecosystems and Sustainability) project, but now with an increase in funding from the Innovate UK fund, this is being scaled out across the Park.
- 2.4 Some Local Authorities are already using the platform alongside the SDNPA, such as Horsham DC and we hope members were able to feed back information to their nominating authority. There was a presentation of SDNPA work in this area to use.
- 2.5 A well-attended and dynamic session on the Authority's Risk Appetite was held before the recent P&R committee. This was very much a collaborative process working with officers and, with all the challenges we face in the future, a worthwhile exercise.
- 2.6 The Planning team gave members a second workshop on the Local Plan review in March. It was a very well presented session that covered a whole range of policies that could be looked at and evolved. Member attendance was very good (thank you all) it resulted in a very good series of debates. Officers were pleased with the clear steers we gave. Thanks to Mike Hughes, Claire Tester and the team.

- 2.7 The session had been preceded by an update from our new Director of Landscape and Strategy, Anita Kerwin-Nye, on the Protected Landscapes Outcomes Framework that was published by Defra at the end of January.
- 2.8 Heather Baker, chairman of Planning Committee, held an away day in January for the committee members and planning officers to discuss the work, any policy changes and issues that the members needed clarity on.
- 2.9 There was a visit to the Glynde estate in East Sussex in February as part of the Whole Estate Plan process. Members spent the day understanding the pressures the estate has in managing its assets, many of which are heritage buildings in need of repair and planning for the future. The Estate has ambitions to farm more sustainably and working with its tenant farmers and the land it now has brought back in house.

Annual Member 1-2-1s

- 2.10 Many thanks to all members for their time in having these 1-2-1 discussions with myself and/or Tim Burr, Deputy Chair. Nationally appointed members have theirs in May.

Parish Workshops

- 2.11 The first of three annual parish workshops was held in March, virtually, to all parishes across the Park. The workshop was split in two, with the first half chaired by myself, with parish members, John Hyland, Andrew Shaxson, Alun Alesbury presenting reports on project activity in terms of Nature Recovery, Climate Action and Access across the three counties. This was then followed with a Q&A session chaired by Steven Ridgeon.
- 2.12 We had several parishes inform us on the call of the nature recovery and access work they are doing in their parishes and the overall atmosphere felt very collegiate.

CEO Recruitment

- 2.13 Members of the Appointment, Management and Standards (AM&S) committee have been meeting with the HR team to work on the process for the recruitment of the new CEO. There is a report being presented at the March NPA outlining this for Members approval.

Social Prescribing

- 2.14 I was very pleased to attend the exhibition in January of the artworks and objects that were produced by the participants in last year's Timescape project. It was inspiring and humbling speaking to the people who had been involved in the project based at Butser Ancient farm last year and hearing about how learning heritage crafts and connecting to nature with the group has had a positive effect on their mental health.

National Parks England

- 2.15 In my role as Chair, I am a director of National Parks England and currently its Deputy Chair. NPE held an in-person board meeting in January which was attended by Minister Rebecca Pow. The Minister was interested in the work National Parks had been doing with the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) project and how we support farmers and landowners incorporating more nature recovery work and sustainable methods into their farming. She was also keen to hear about the many initiatives we do for young people with apprenticeships and green skills training.
- 2.16 I attended Defra's Landscapes event in January, which they held at Kew Gardens, in my capacity as Deputy Chair NPE. The event marked the anniversary of the Environmental Improvement Plan and was the launch of the Protected Landscapes Outcomes Framework. It provided an opportunity to speak to our Secretary of State, Steve Barclay and mention our Green Finance summit. Getting to connect with partners in the Protected Landscape world, in person, was so valuable and I was able to follow up after the board meeting with Minister Pow and reiterated our invitation to her to visit the South Downs.
- 2.17 London National Park City launched their visitor centre on Fleet Street London in January. I attended the event and was pleased to represent the South Down National Park and NPE at this fantastic new initiative. So many potential opportunities for cross collaboration.

Transport for the South-East

- 2.18 Since our last meeting, there have been two Board meetings of Transport for the South-East (TfSE), where Tim Burr represents not only the National Park, but other protected landscapes in the region too. In commenting on their business plan, Tim pointed out that it said little about reducing the environmental impact of transport, despite this being one of the three key aims set by the Department of Transport. The impact was highlighted in subsequent discussion of parking for lorries, where drivers do need better facilities, but the Kent Downs National Landscape may not welcome the new lorry park that a developer is seeking consent to build there. Tim is now considering with Mike Hughes how we can be more aware of transport issues affecting our regional National Landscapes (NL) formerly Areas of Outstanding National Beauty (AONBs).

Nature Recovery Activity

- 2.19 Four of our members who represent authorities and parishes within the Meon catchment have come together to lobby for better protection for the River Meon. This chalkstream flows mostly within the Park and is significantly less changed under man's influence than its larger siblings, the Itchen and the Test, but, unlike them, enjoys no statutory protection. Following an initial meeting with the Chief Exec of the Hampshire & IOW Wildlife Trust there was an unexpected opportunity to have its case raised in a House of Lords debate on 29 February. The Group will continue to lobby for early delivery of DEFRA's long-awaited Chalkstream Recovery Pack, re-vitalise the Meon Partnership that brings together local authorities, the SDNPA, Southern Water and other interested parties and develop a catchment-wide policy principle for the Local Plan Review.

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 (Interim); Head of Governance.
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	None

