

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**
Date **9 July 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 28 March 2024.

2. Update

Member's Activities

2.1 P&R away day – Melanie Hunt, chair of the P&R committee, held a workshop in April to review the terms of reference for the committee. This enabled the committee to check that it was fulfilling its function and making a difference to the Authority's delivery of our purposes and duties. This was followed by a workshop on delivery the new Partnership Management Plan.

2.2 Local Plan review workshops – Thank you to members for attending the site visits and workshops in April and May.

2.3 Members had a site visit to Lancing College to hear about the development of a Whole Estate Plan for their land. Together with the immediate grounds, the school owns an adjacent farm which had recently come back in-house for management. Thank you to member Stephen Whale for encouraging the school to think about how their land is being managed and what more could be done for nature. The member feedback from the visit forms part of the WEP making process.

2.4 Members had a strategic day focused on the future of energy. What will future demand look like and how is the Authority supporting communities and residents in the transition away from fossil fuels? What policies could we create to help simplify this transition with the levers we have? We had talks from Greater South-East Net-Zero Hub, Energise South Downs and Community Energy South. Thank you to the officers for creating an informative day and to members for their attendance.

New Members

2.5 We welcome two new members to the Authority: Mark Potter, a Secretary of State Appointee and Paul Bevan, an East Sussex Parish member. A governance induction for both took place in June and was balanced with a walk and discussion at Harting Down. We look forward to working with them both soon.

CEO Recruitment Update

- 2.6 At the last NPA meeting in March, the members of the Appointments, Management and Standards (AM&S) committee were delegated with the task of recruiting the new CEO. After a competitive tender, the firm Gatenby Sanderson were procured to help with the recruitment process.
- 2.7 The CEO role advert went live on Monday 20 May, with applications closing on the 17 June.
- 2.8 The shortlisted candidates will be interviewed across 8 and 9 August. Informing those interviews will be feedback from stakeholders and staff.
- 2.9 The Appointment Management and Standards (AMS) committee will then bring their recommendation to an extraordinary NPA meeting on Thursday 22 August for approval.

Departing Members

- 2.10 Sadly, we are saying goodbye to one of our members this month. Annie Brown is leaving after 4 years on the Authority. Annie has been such a valuable voice with her farming and land management background. Having the perspective of someone with experience of working in nature friendly way on her farm, hosting educational visits and an understanding of applying for ELM payments in our meetings has been invaluable. We wish her well in her new role as High Sherriff of East Sussex next year and thank her for her service.

National Parks England

- 2.11 In my role as Chair of South Downs NPA, I am automatically a director of National Parks England. At the recent AGM, I was elected by my fellow directors to take over the Chair from departing Neil Heseltine (Yorkshire Dales NPA).
- 2.12 I have represented English National Parks in a meeting with Victoria Vyvan and Gavin Lane from the CLA, where we discussed how we could work together on extending the FiPL grants and supporting farmers through the ELMs transition.
- 2.13 As Chair of NPE, I am a member of the Protected Landscapes Partnership board. The board visited the North Wessex Downs NL, in June, at Pewsey Downs. The visit brought together chairs and CEOs of National Landscapes, National Trails, National Parks England and lead officers from Natural England and Defra. We were shown an example of two farms on Pewsey Downs who are working together, side by side, as part of the NL's Big Chalk project. This is a landscape scale project restoring chalk grassland with conservation grazing management across the chalk block. I was struck by the many similarities between the North Wessex Downs and the South Downs such as population density, geology, closeness to London, development pressures. The work that Big Chalk, (and the Changing Chalk project in the South Downs) is doing is so vitality important not just for biodiversity, but for also protecting the aquifers that surround London and the South-East. The PLP aims to promote more collaborative working across protected landscapes. We in the South Downs have a lot in common with our surrounding NLs and much to learn.

National Parks UK

- 2.14 The National Parks UK board, comprising of the 15 UK National Park Chairs met, with the CEOs, in Loch Lomond in June. We had updates on nature recovery from Alison Barnes, New Forest CEO and the 'Race to Zero' initiative led by Richard Leafe Lakes CEO. Loch Lomond NPA, as hosts, described their efforts to diversify their board through a government backed scheme of Board Apprenticeships. Having opportunities to learn from our colleagues is so valuable. We were shown a nature restoration project which involved the creation of a tree nursery which will use seeds harvested from native species in the surrounding area. The scale of the amount trees needed for the project was extraordinary. Loch Lomond NPA has been a recipient of money from the BMW Recharge scheme through National Park Partnerships. They are using their money as part of a large upgrade to their visitor hub at Tarbet. Investing in a hub which will see an extended visitor centre and café, a bank of EV chargers and is served by the nearby train station, as well as a jetty on the loch. An important hub to then explore the rest of the area.

Campaign for National Parks

2.15 My deputy, Tim Burr, is our representative on the Council of the Campaign for National Parks (CNP), which goes back to the campaigns in the first half of the last century leading to our founding legislation, the [National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949](#). He attended their Council meeting on 22 May, an on-line gathering of some 60 people. Topics included the 75th Anniversary of the 1949 Act, to be celebrated at the National Park Societies' Conference in September (hosted this year by the South Downs Society); the Ramblers' campaign for a new Access to Nature Bill; and of course the CNP's own 'Health Check' report on Nature Recovery, published in April. This last was simply an update by Ruth Bradshaw, who ran the health check exercise. It would have been good to discuss its rather negative portrayal of our progress on nature recovery, but the concluding breakout session was instead devoted to campaign goals for the (then) upcoming Election campaign.

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

