

**Agenda Item 09**  
**Report NPA25/26-01**

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**  
Date **8 July 2025**  
By **Authority Chair**  
Title of Report **Authority Chair Update**  
**Note**

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**Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to note the update from the Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority.**

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**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report outlines the activities of the Chair and the Members of the SDNPA since the NPA meeting on the 27 March 2025.

**2. Update**

Member activity

- 2.1 The P&R committee had their annual away day on the 22 April at the Weald & Downland Museum. The committee were presented with the findings from the Partnership Management Plan (PMP) engagement process and talked through the production of the draft Plan. Many thanks to Anne Rehill and Ruth James for all their hard work. In the afternoon, members were taken to see the works completed so far on the Centurion Way at Singleton.
- 2.2 Members attended a visit to the Foley Estate near Liphook, Hants in May to hear about the challenges facing the estate and the hopes and plans of the family. The Whole Estate Plan process involves a member site visit for early feedback into the draft plan.
- 2.3 To keep the Partnership Management Plan production on timetable, an extraordinary full Authority meeting was held on 22 May to approve the draft plan to go out to consultation. The board were taken through the presentations on the engagement work that helped formulate the plan by Anne Rehill, and then Ruth James talked Members through the new shortened Vision and the draft plan itself. Members engaged in a quality debate and provided constructive feedback to the team. Thank you again to Anne and Ruth for the incredible effort that they have put into this Partnership Management Plan process.
- 2.4 A workshop was held after the board meeting on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and the Authority's approach to allocating funds.
- 2.5 Thank you to members Antonia Cox and Paul Bevan, alongside myself, for being on the judging panel for the Sussex Heritage Trust Awards. We saw a range of developments and the winner of the South Downs award will be announced at the Awards ceremony on 2 July.
- 2.6 The Local Plan review is still progressing and in June there were 2 further workshops on recently submitted sites.
- 2.7 P&R committee met on the 26 June and amongst other items, the Westerlands Whole Estate Plan was adopted.

- 2.8 An online parish webinar on the draft PMP was held on 1 July

Chair Activity

- 2.9 I have continued, with the amazing help and input from officers, to take some of our new MPs out into the National Park in their constituencies. Clare Kerr and Amanda Elms and I took Sian Berry MP for Brighton Pavillon on a tour around Stamner Park in April.
- 2.10 I have met with some inspiring women leaders across our sector in the past few months. Kathy Atkinson, chair of the Surrey Hills NL, Dr Rose O'Neill from Campaign for National Parks and Yvonne Witter, Chair of Peak Mosaic and a member of the Peak District NPA, discussing the future of Protected Landscapes, Governance and belonging.
- 2.11 In June, with Siôn McGeever, I met with 4 out of the 6 Liberal Democrat MPs that have constituencies across the South Downs NP, in Parliament, to discuss the work of the Authority, and the challenges and opportunities we face. They were very keen to hear about affordable housing, viticulture policies and the PMP.
- 2.12 In June I was on the interview panel for the recruitment of our vacant nationally appointed SoS member. 8 candidates were interviewed, and the Minister is due to appoint by the end of July.

National Parks England

- 2.13 The South Downs hosted an in-person board meeting of NPE at the beginning of April. The Chairs and CEOs of 8 of the English National Parks came down to the eastern end of the Park so we could show them the work we are doing at Seven Sisters and the work we're doing in partnership with colleagues at the National Trust. The board meeting, which I chaired, took place at the Railway Lands in Lewes and was a productive session.
- 2.14 In my role as Chair of NPE I attended the Future Countryside conference in the Peak District on the 20 May.
- 2.15 I was asked to speak at an online meeting of the Campaign for National Parks council on 21 May. The discussion focus of the meeting was on the future of National Park Authority governance. I stressed that they should consider the thoughts of NPAs in their thinking in the spirit of "nothing about us, without us". There was a good debate on the subject, and I have been asked to be part of their steering group.
- 2.16 As Chair of NPE I sit on the governance board for the Protected Landscape Partnership. This met in April and then again in June for a meeting that I chaired. The chairing is taken in rotation of the 4 bodies that are part of the partnership: Natural England, National Parks, National Landscapes and National Trails.

National Parks UK

- 2.17 The 15 UK National Parks got together for their annual information sharing and networking in the Peak District at the end of April. There were some very thought-provoking presentations, especially on climate change, the Protected Landscape Change Observatory and National Parks branding. In the afternoon we were taken to the Chatsworth Estate to hear about their Whole Estate Plan. Great to see these tools being used around the country, having started here.

Thanks

- 2.18 I wanted to give my sincere and heart-felt thanks to Tim Burr who is stepping down from being Deputy Chair. He has been the most diligent and perceptive partner, and I have really enjoyed working with him in the chair and deputy role.
- 2.19 Janet Duncton for her time and valuable input as a board member on the South Downs Trust.
- 2.20 Stephen Whale for his time on the Seven Sisters steering group and before that the Trading Company, which he chaired.

Local Access Forum (LAF)

- 2.21 Chaired by Andrew Shaxson with Tim Burr as the other SDNPA member. The Forum has had a recent recruitment campaign, with seven new members joining representing Cycling (Off-Road), Landowners, Disability, Under-represented Groups, Wildlife and Conservation, Climate Change, and Health and Wellbeing.

**3. Conclusion**

- 3.1 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

