

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 2nd December 2015

This is the latest of my regular notes for EHAPTC Meetings about some of the activities of the National Park Authority (NPA) which may be of interest to Parish Councils.

As Parish Clerks now receive regular Highlights of SDNPA work, my notes can be shorter than in the past. The NPA's Highlights note is not an exhaustive list of achievements, but selects some of the projects that the Authority and its partners are working on.

To complement those notes I will focus primarily on the consultation on the latest version of the National Park's draft Local Plan (the 'Preferred Options' version) as this was completed at the end of October. I will, however, also mention a number of other issues under the following headings:

- Defra and the Spending Review
- News from the Partnership
- Sustainable Communities Fund
- Section 106 Funds
- On the ground, learning and outreach
- Local contacts.

South Downs Local Plan: Preferred Options Consultation

There has been some very positive feedback about the Preferred Options version of the Local Plan with its Landscape-led approach and there were also many complimentary comments about the consultation process, including the special 'roadshow' events and workshops for Parish Councils. In addition to the meeting on 9th September, there was also another event in Meonstoke and one in Greatham as well as similar opportunities in Sussex. The consultation opportunity attracted lots of media attention (including BBC and ITV) as well as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and on-line forums. All observations and learning points from the consultation exercise will also be considered very closely.

Initial estimates suggest that there are probably about 2,000 separate comments on the Plan from about 450 people / organisations. About a third of respondents used the on-line system with the remainder using post and email. Over 40 Parish Councils responded.

Analysis of all the responses will now take some time and it is anticipated that all the responses will be available on-line by February with a full report to be produced for the National Park's Planning Committee at the beginning of March. Amended policies will then be developed for consideration by the Planning Committee from April onwards, including explanations about how they have been revised in response to comments made during the consultation exercise. It is likely that there will be further Parish Workshops at some stage.

Defra and the Spending Review

In his recent Spending Review announcement, the Chancellor said: "Our commitment to farming and the countryside is reflected in the protection of funding for our national parks and for our forests". The Minister responsible for National Parks, Rory Stewart MP, telephoned SDNPA Chief Executive Trevor Beattie shortly afterwards to provide more details and to acknowledge achievements and contributions made by SDNPA. The budget for National Parks as a whole (not necessarily for each individual National Park) will be fixed at the level of the current year for the next few years – although it is not yet clear whether that

is in cash or real terms and, as the Minister pointed, no such pledge from any government (least of all one that extends into the next Parliament) could ever be 100% certain. However, the announcement does provide a secure basis for the NPA to make long term plans. The Minister was also keen to stress the need to continue to introduce efficiencies and to generate new sources of income and this will be addressed as the NPA finalises its budget for the forthcoming financial years.

The day after the Spending Review, the NPA was able to host a visit [from Claire Moriarty, Permanent Secretary](#) at Defra. As she lives in the area, Claire is [already familiar with the landscape](#) but the visit enabled the NPA to draw attention to a range of issues and to [brief her on plans for the future](#). The NPA is always keen to maintain [close and proactive links](#) with Defra and other important partners and agencies.

News from the Partnership

A recent meeting of [the South Downs Partnership considered how](#) the National Park Partnership Management Plan and [State of the Park Report](#) might be reviewed and refreshed. [Both documents have a life of at least five years so there is no immediate need for action but](#) the NPA is [planning ahead to ensure that there is the time and the information necessary to update them through a process that will involve the whole National Park – just as when they were created](#). [The Partnership](#), which includes representation from a wide range of sectors and organisations (including parish councils), generated [some very useful proposals](#) and will return [to the subject](#) in the future.

Sustainable Communities Fund

As well as continuing to be a member of the NPA's Planning Committee, I have recently been appointed to the Sustainable Communities Panel and have been selected to be Chairman of this part of the NPA's decision-making processes, working alongside some experienced panel members from a range of partner organisations.

Any partnership or other not for profit organisations which include social enterprise, community interest companies, voluntary organisations and 'for profit' organisations (these projects cannot be for financial gain to the business) can apply for funding if they believe their project is bringing social, environmental, economic or cultural benefits to a community within the National Park.

Grants are available for up to 50% of the project cost from £250 to a maximum of £10,000.

More information is available via: <http://southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/supporting-communities-business/sustainable-communities-fund/>

Section 106 Funds

Within the National Park area it is anticipated that the CIL regime will come into effect from 1st April 2016. Until that date S.106 funds can still be collected by the planning authority for environmental, community or transport projects. However, Parish Councils now need to have specific projects in mind (and contributions currently being collected should only be used to deliver those specific projects) as part of the Government's plan to stop Parish Councils building up pots of resources for unspecified purposes.

Parish Councils may, therefore, find it helpful to update their spending priorities on a regular basis and to inform Gareth Giles at the National park Authority, preferably with a copy to Alisdair Tweddle at EHDC, too.

Some Parish Councils may currently have sums of funding, collected from previous developments, held by EHDC and SDNPA. To find out the sums involved, the contact details are Alisdair Tweddle (EHDC): Alisdair.Tweddle@easthants.gov.uk and 01730 234282 or Claire Mattingley (SDNPA): Claire.Mattingley@southdowns.gov.uk and 01730 819259.

On the ground, learning and outreach

On the ground, volunteers and staff (sometimes in joint exercises with local community conservation groups) continue to manage important areas of woodland, heathland and chalk grassland. As well as coppicing and scrub clearance, projects have been designed to improve conditions for specific butterflies, dormice and farmland birds such as turtle dove and lapwing. Work on the River Rother has included the installation of mink rafts, river fly monitoring training sessions and the boardwalk has been lengthened to improve the walking experience.

Learning and outreach over the last few months has included providing training for John Muir Leaders at the East Meon Sustainability Centre, working with Treloar School Employers to widen career opportunities for students at this flagship school for disabilities at Holybourne and working with hundreds of Portsmouth school children to promote woodlands as part of a schools countryside day with Hampshire Country Learning.

Local contacts

- Natalie Fellows, the Planning Link Officer for Hampshire parishes, can be contacted via: 07872 410442 and natalie.fellows@southdowns.gov.uk
- The Authority's Western Downs team, based at the Queen Elizabeth Country Park, acts as a 'first stop shop' for communities and land managers, providing advice and support towards achieving the national park's purposes. The team also acts as the 'eyes and ears' on the ground, assisting with a wide range of activities. Contact the team to find out how the NPA may be able to help your community and please encourage anyone interested in volunteering to contact Nick Heasman, our Area Manager, on nick.heasman@southdowns.gov.uk or 02392 571381

Although my role is to act in the best interests of the whole of the National Park, I always aim to maintain close contact with Parish Councils in East Hampshire to make sure that all important issues, concerns and ideas are taken into account by the National Park Authority.

Doug Jones, Member of the South Downs National Park Authority and Buriton Parish Council
doug.jones@southdowns.gov.uk 27th November 2015