

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for EHAPTC Meeting of 20th June 2012

Latest news

In conjunction with HALC, EHAPTC and the Winchester Association, the National Park Authority (NPA) organised a very useful meeting for Parish and Town Council representatives on Wednesday 30th May.

There were over 40 Parish Councillors at the meeting which covered a range of issues relating to the development of a Management Plan for the National Park and a number of planning-related matters.

Two of the Park Authority's four Directors (and a number of other staff) spoke at the meeting and the intention is to have two of these liaison meetings every year.

The grants available from the National Park's 'Sustainable Communities Fund' were summarised and it was noted that there will be opportunities for projects undertaken by communities to contribute to some of the most important 'pillars' of the NPA's work.

Information and updates about all this work can be found on the National Park website <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/> and via the 'Forum' pages <http://southdownsforum.ning.com/main>

More workshops on specific topics are likely to be held over the next few months and details will be circulated to parish councils as their views and inputs are recognised as being very important.

With regard to Planning, the Director of Planning and colleagues found it very helpful to hear at first hand about the issues facing parishes in the Hampshire part of the National Park, both on 'planning policy' matters (such as accommodating growth and controlling temporary but nevertheless potentially intrusive activities) and 'process' issues (particularly around the approach to a single computer system for processing applications in the Park across 179 parishes).

As a result of the meeting, and to help build good rapport between parishes and the new Park Authority, representatives from four parish councils in East Hampshire are being invited to meet with and illustrate directly to NPA officers the issues that they are facing. This meeting is due to take place as early as possible in June and it should help to shape a guidance note for all parishes to assist in the transition to using the new system.

One particular issue for some parishes was the use of a 21 day period for consultation responses. Whilst it was recognised that this may mean some changes for some parishes, it appears that parishes throughout Sussex (and in Winchester District) are happy with these arrangements – which then give National Park officers adequate time to consider whether their recommendations on any planning application may go against the views of the local parish council.

The National Park Authority recognises the importance of Parish Councils in the planning system and this has already led to a commitment of taking applications to the full Planning Committee if parish comments are contrary to officers' recommendations. The intention of the 21 day period is, therefore, not to limit responses but to try to work together to reach decisions in a timely manner.

As a result of the discussions at the meeting, the NPA now plans to notify Clerks whenever a planning application is validated – generally a few days before the weekly list is circulated. The 21 day period will only commence from the date of the weekly list. If parishes feel that they need an extension then early liaison with the relevant planning officer is recommended. The NPA is also considering that, when a decision is imminent and officers have not received a comment from the Parish Council, they could contact the Clerk. But, in order to avoid unnecessary administrative work, parishes would be asked to submit ‘no objection’ comments whenever appropriate – rather than simply not commenting at all.

A guidance note for Parish Councils on these matters will be issued shortly.

There was some discussion about the new concept of Neighbourhood Plans. The NPA reiterated its offer to try to help communities decide upon the merits of undertaking such plans and with ideas for how they might be conducted. A guidance note (which will also refer to other community planning exercises such as Village Design Statements, Parish Plans, Local Landscape Character Assessments, Biodiversity Action Plans and Conservation Area Appraisals) will be produced by the NPA over the next couple of months.

Useful contacts

- The Hampshire part of the South Downs is overseen by the **Western Area team** based at Queen Elizabeth Country Park. The team consists of Area Manager Nick Heasman and three rangers – all with their own specific areas of work and expertise. Their overall remit is to act as a ‘first stop shop’ to communities and land managers through advice and support to achieve the national park’s purposes. Please contact Nick Heasman via nick.heasman@southdowns.gov.uk or 02392571381 for further information on how the South Downs National Park Authority can help your community
- The National Park Authority is the **planning authority** for the area, but the vast majority of planning applications are delegated to East Hampshire District Council and handled much as they have been prior to the creation of the National Park. The NPA ‘calls in’ a relatively small proportion of all the planning applications for its own Planning Committee to consider and decide. These will generally be potentially sensitive and significant cases. Any Parish Councils with any queries about planning matters inside the National Park (or just outside the boundary) should contact the special ‘Link Officer’ for this area: Nat Belderson (EHDC office - 01730 234130; SDNPA Planning reception (Midhurst) - 01730 811759 or Mobile – 07917602373). In due course the NPA will be developing its own planning policies against which all planning applications within the Park will be judged – and Parish Councils will have opportunities to influence all of these policies
- Details about **grants** available through the National Park’s ‘Sustainable Communities Fund’ can be found in the ‘Funding’ section of the Park’s website (<http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/communities/funding>) and ideas can be discussed with Mark Rose, External Funding Coordinator, on 01730 811755 or Mark.Rose@southdowns.gov.uk

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