

## **SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK**

### **Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 10<sup>th</sup> June 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 probably 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 briefing notes I will focus primarily on **the forthcoming consultation on the latest version of the National Park's draft Local Plan** (the 'Preferred Options' version) as this is likely to be a very important document for all Parish Councils affected. I will also mention a number of other issues under the following headings:

- Bills in the Queen's Speech
- Changes to the Sustainable Communities Fund
- Support for local food producers – and consumers
- Other work 'on the ground'
- Local contacts.

#### **An update on the forthcoming Local Plan for the National Park – an opportunity to have your say during the next consultation phase: 2 September to 28 October 2015**

- As the South Downs National Park Authority is the Planning Authority for all the land within the boundaries of the Park, it needs to produce a Local Plan for the entire area
- This is the first time that a single Local Plan has been produced as one entity for this area – and the Local Plan will supersede all existing Local Plans and Joint Core Strategies which currently cover the area
- The Local Plan will form the main part of the 'Development Plan' alongside any adopted Neighbourhood Plans (being developed by some communities in the National Park) and alongside Minerals & Waste Plans
- The Local Plan must be in conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the DEFRA Vision and Circular for National parks (2010)
- The Local Plan will be the key to delivering sustainable development in the National Park and so the Park Authority is keen to ensure that the best possible Plan is produced
- To this end, another significant period of public consultation is being planned for eight weeks in the autumn: from 2 September to 28 October 2015
- This consultation will be about the 'Preferred Options' version of the Local Plan
- This version follows on from the Local Plan Options Consultation document which was published in February 2014 – and it will have taken into consideration all the representations that were made on that document
- After the forthcoming consultation, amendments will be made to the Plan and, in due course, it will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for independent examination
- The National Park Authority hopes that this process will be completed in 2017 so that the Plan can then form the basis for development for the next 15 years (up to 2032)
- The Plan will contain a full set of planning policies with specific topics ranging from landscape, conservation, tourism and recreation through to land to be allocated for development: employment, housing etc

- All the draft policies for the forthcoming 'Preferred Options' plan have now been considered by the National Park's Planning Committee. All these meetings have taken place in public and a number of Parish Councils have responded to suggestions that they might like to attend so as to learn about the potential policies in advance and have their say on particular matters if so minded
- The latest version of the 'Preferred Options' plan can be found as Item 8 in the papers for the National Park's Planning Committee of 11 June 2015 via this link - <http://southdowns.gov.uk/meeting/11-june-2015/>. The Appendix to Item 8 contains all the details (407 pages). After this meeting of the Planning Committee the draft version will be considered by the full National Park Authority in June and July so that formal consultation can take place from 2 September
- The National Park Authority will be arranging a range of ways for people to learn about the Plan during this consultation period – and to take part in making it even better. It is envisaged that an on-line video will be available to help people understand the context, the challenges to be faced etc
- Parish Councils are well placed to help ensure that this Local Plan is as good as it can possibly be. I would encourage Parish Councils to spend some time considering it – and responding during the consultation period.

#### Some things to look out for

- As well as considering all the policies in the Plan, please try to think about **anything that might be missing!** What policies might help you try to ensure the best future for the National Park?
- For parishes which are not producing Neighbourhood Plans, this Local Plan is the only way of obtaining designation for **Local Green Spaces**. This is a relatively new way of providing special protection against development for green areas which are felt to be of particular importance to local communities. Parish Councils will need to submit details during the consultation period described above (2 September – 28 October) and the following sources of guidance may be helpful: <http://www.oss.org.uk/what-we-do/local-green-space-designation/> and <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space/local-green-space-designation/>
- There will be revisions to **Settlement Policy Boundaries** (to be illustrated by a series of maps) and **allocations of new housing** to a number of settlements across the National Park (with maps illustrating proposed locations)

#### Draft Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule

- The draft Charging Schedule will be published alongside the Local Plan Preferred Options documentation. This will form the second of two consultation stages that need to be undertaken before the CIL Charging Schedule can be adopted. Parish Councils have already had an opportunity to comment on a Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule in February / March 2014
- A copy of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) will also be published alongside the Draft Charging Schedule and projects from Parish Councils can always be considered. Contact [gareth.giles@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:gareth.giles@southdowns.gov.uk) for more information

#### Bills in the Queen's Speech

The recent Queen's Speech outlined the 26 Bills that the Government will introduce. Those likely to be of interest to the National Park Authority and Parish Councils include: the Cities & Local Government Devolution Bill, the Energy Bill and the Housing Bill. Details are not yet

available but proposals for streamlining local authority governance may deserve close attention; the Housing Bill will be the vehicle for bringing in the right to buy for housing association tenants; and the Energy Bill will remove the requirement on the Secretary of State to approve onshore wind farm planning applications above 50MW (this means that SDNPA, like any other local planning authority, would be responsible for handling such applications in future).

### **Changes to the Sustainable Communities Fund**

The Sustainable Communities Fund has recently been revised so as to try to make its funding go further and increasing competitiveness between bids. The main changes are:

- The maximum grant is to be £10,000 with two categories of grants: small grants (up to £2,000) and large grants (over £2,000)
- Small grants (apart from community events) will be considered by the SCF panel at four meetings per year whilst all large and community event bids will be considered at two meetings per year
- The maximum portion of the total project cost that will be supported will be 50%
- Some areas no longer fall within the scope of SCF Grants and will be supported in other ways: conservation, environmental improvement and practical work – Grassroots Fund; building renovation and development – LEADER Fund; Research projects – Strategic Fund; Booklets, leaflets and interpretation – Communications Team and Strategic Fund

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

### **Support for local food producers – and consumers**

The official launch of the National Park's local food website (SouthDownsFood.org) will take place on 22<sup>nd</sup> June at Cowdray Park, Midhurst. The event should attract significant media interest as well as key partners including farmers and other local food producers. Over 250 verified local food businesses are already on the website which will provide a one-stop resource for everyone with a passion for local food and drink: from visitors to producers, wholesalers to pubs, restaurants and bars. It is anticipated that over 650 businesses will have been verified and listed on website by the end of December 2015, making this National Park initiative the largest local food produce network in the UK by a significant margin.

### **Other work 'on the ground'**

- Some new summer Saturday and Sunday bus services are due to start running from July, connecting railway stations, visitor attractions, village pubs etc. The services are likely to cover: Uppark, South Harting, Petersfield, Steep, Sheet, Hill Brow, Liss, Greatham, Selborne, Lower Farringdon, Chawton and Alton. Any support or promotion that Parish Councils can give to boost passenger numbers on these services would be greatly appreciated. Please contact [allison.thorpe@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:allison.thorpe@southdowns.gov.uk) or 01730 819243
- A number of venues (including Durleigh Marsh Farm and Butser Ancient Farm) have applied for cycle stands as part of a Free Cycle Parking Stands programme
- Local Rangers and volunteers have continued to deliver valuable improvements on the ground: dozens more Barn Owl boxes have been installed and, working with Hampshire Rural Learning, staff have educated scores of schoolchildren about the ecology of owls
- There have also been special outdoor sessions for primary school children and cubs to learn about ponds, pond life and other activities

- Staff have helped farmers put together joint applications for a facilitation fund from the Countryside Stewardship Scheme to support them in delivering shared environmental outcomes that they would be unable to deliver if acting alone
- Volunteers have carried out many more days of scrub clearing across the National Park and time has also been spent on installing gates, stiles and signposts along the rights of way networks
- Rangers and Members of the Park Authority have given talks to Parish Councils at Annual Parish Meetings and other occasions
- A new 'Take the Lead' campaign to encourage responsible dog walking has been launched via social media, including four short films on the National Park website
- The annual free newspaper, South Downs View, has been published with copies being distributed to accommodation providers, libraries, garden centres, shops, pubs, cafes, restaurants, Tourist Information Points etc. It includes tips on places to explore, family days out, an events listing for the summer season and details of current projects going on in the National Park
- and the new National Park website continues to attract increasing numbers of visitors. Take a look at: <http://southdowns.gov.uk/>

#### **Local contacts**

- Natalie Fellows, the Planning Link Officer for Hampshire parishes, can be contacted via: 07872 410442 and [natalie.fellows@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto: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](mailto: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*  
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