

## **SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK**

### **Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 8<sup>th</sup> June 2016**

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 they were initially. 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 following topics:

- Points from the May liaison meeting
- The Queens Speech and other national-level news
- News for teachers and schools
- Dark skies success
- Findings from the 'Secrets of the High Woods' project
- Other practical help 'on the ground'
- Leaflets and information
- Sustainable Communities Fund Grants
- New local contacts.

#### **Points from the May liaison meeting**

The latest of the regular EHAPTC / SDNPA liaison meetings took place in Liss on 18<sup>th</sup> May and was very well attended. As well as informative 'question and answer' sessions there were workshops on Planning Enforcement and on the Consultee Access System which allows Town and Parish Councils to monitor and comment on planning applications. Details of the enforcement system are available here: [www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning/enforcement/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning/enforcement/)

Chris Paterson also introduced the South Downs Community Planning toolkit, a copy of which is available (free of charge) to all Parish Councils, and SDNPA Director of Planning Tim Slaney provided an update on the timetable for the South Downs Local Plan with a revised plan due to be submitted for examination in September 2017 following detailed analysis of all the comments received on the consultative draft version.

#### **National plan launched in South Downs**

Defra's Secretary of State, Liz Truss MP, chose the South Downs National Park as the place to launch the Government's new plan for National Parks, which aims to help more young people to connect with nature. Overall themes in the plan cover everything from promoting food from National Parks; encouraging volunteering in National Parks; through to delivering new apprenticeships for young people, and promoting projects in National Parks that enhance physical and mental health. Defra Minister for National Parks, Rory Stewart MP, has also visited the South Downs for a special briefing event with some very positive feedback

The Queen's Speech contained little of direct relevance to National Park Authorities, although it will be interesting to watch emerging details of the Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure Bill. New legislation is intended to strengthen neighbourhood planning by making the local government duty to support communities more transparent and by improving the process for reviewing and updating plans. It also strengthens compulsory purchase powers and puts the National Infrastructure Commission on a statutory footing.

## News for teachers and schools

The National Park Authority is running its Travel Grant scheme again this financial year. The Travel Grant allows schools from the 20% most deprived communities in and around the National Park to benefit from subsidised coach travel to visit providers featured on the 'Learning Map', offering insights into wildlife, landscape or history of the area. Eligible schools can apply for a grant of up to £300 towards the cost of their coach transport and can do so by completing the application form on the Travel Grant page of the NPA website:

<http://learning.southdowns.gov.uk/learning/travel-grant/>

Grants are available in two tranches with £5,000 available for visits from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> August and £5,000 available for visits from 1<sup>st</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017. Schools can apply at any time for these grants but they are allocated on a first come first served basis.

149 teachers and outdoor learning providers attended the 4<sup>th</sup> annual "Our South Downs" Teachers conference at Ditcham Park School in April. As well as inspiring key-note speakers on the topic of 'Dirty Teaching', there were hands-on workshops for primary and secondary teachers as well as opportunities to meet providers of outdoor learning activities and guidance about curriculum links to local outdoor learning including literacy, numeracy, science, geography, history, tourism and managing behaviour.

## Dark skies success

As Parish Councils are probably already aware, the South Downs National Park has recently been designated as the world's newest "*International Dark Skies Reserve*". There are only 11 of these Reserves in the whole world. The people announcing the designation have said that it is remarkable that a true dark-sky experience remains within reach of nearly 17 million people in southeast England, and that it is a testament to the hard work of local residents in keeping it that way.

## Findings from the 'Secrets of the High Woods' project

The project which flew a laser-plane over acres of ancient South Downs woodland, then sent volunteers out to check what the 'lumps and bumps' really were and also scoured through archives and captured local memories in recorded interviews is preparing to reveal what has been discovered. There will be a Hidden Past festival in Portsmouth, a travelling exhibition, a book, community digs and a conference. More details will be released in the near future.

## Other practical help 'on the ground'

In recent months the National Park Authority has also pursued a wide range of activities:

- arranging a popular series of Discovery Rides and Community Cycle Events as well as training 30 cycling ambassadors so that they are now able to promote responsible cycling alongside knowledge of the National Park within a range of communities.
- helping groups of farms to cluster together to seek funding to help bring about multiple landscape, habitat and bio-diversity benefits. Amongst the farm clusters in the Hampshire part of the Park is a partnership in the Selborne area and one in the Butser area.
- submitting a bid for European Funding for a project to develop approaches to improve water quality, reduce sedimentation and the impact of nutrients (nitrates and phosphates). The project will also test and develop environmentally effective, economically sustainable and adaptable approaches to a range of landscapes
- supported rehearsals for a project at the Chichester Festival Theatre which uses drama as a way of exploring young peoples' sense of place growing up in and around the South Downs

- National Park volunteers have, as usual, carried out a wide range of activities including coppicing to encourage butterflies, scrub and rhododendron clearance, hedge-laying, access improvements, installing more barn owl boxes and re-placing footbridges.
- Rangers and volunteers have also led practical tasks in the South Downs for a MIND (mental health charity) group.

## **Leaflets and information**

The National Park's annual free newspaper, South Downs View, has been published with 50,000 copies being distributed throughout the Park via a range of outlets and more leaflets about local walks (including the Meon Valley Trail) and 'delicious days out' (highlighting a flavour of local produce available) have also been produced.

The NPA's social media presence continues to grow with topics including promoting a new Miles without Stiles initiative: a new set of walking routes which are suitable for wheelchair users, families with pushchairs, dog walkers with less active dogs and less agile walkers.

All publications can be viewed on the NPA website – [southdowns.gov.uk](http://southdowns.gov.uk) – and many walking routes are now available on a new 'View Ranger' mobile app.

## **Sustainable Communities Fund**

As well as continuing to be a member of the NPA's Planning Committee, I am the Chairman of the NPA's Sustainable Communities Panel, 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.

One of the recent wards has been towards an 'Edward Thomas Centenary Celebration' in Petersfield in March 2017 which will commemorate his life and poetry and highlight his connections with Steep, Petersfield and the South Downs. The initiative will include solo and choral settings of his poems, include music by composers with local and South Downs connections, include locally based musicians, involve other local community organisations and provide exhibitions at the Petersfield Festival Hall and Museum.

Another recent grant has been made to the Meon Valley Beekeepers for a new 'teaching' aviary to allow the beekeepers, who provide a free swarm-collection service, to isolate collected swarms for assessment of their health and temperament. The apiary will also provide a base from which the association can attend local and group events as well as provide an opportunity for bee experience visits to local groups.

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

## **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 the new Countryside & Policy Manager, Nigel James ([nigel.james@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:nigel.james@southdowns.gov.uk)) or the new Lead Ranger Elaina Whittaker-Slark ([Elaina.Slark@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:Elaina.Slark@southdowns.gov.uk)) – both of whom will already be well-known to many parishes. Nick Heasman and Dan Oakley have both got new, expanded roles responsible for other parts of the National Park.

*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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