

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 7th June 2017

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 and others now receive copies of the new SDNPA e-Newsletters (*South Downs News*), my notes can be shorter than they were initially. People can sign up here to have the [newsletter delivered to their inbox](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-publications/south-downs-news-the-newsletter-for-the-national-park/) every month. Past issues of the e-newsletter can be read as pdf documents via this link: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-publications/south-downs-news-the-newsletter-for-the-national-park/>.

The new *South Downs News* e-Newsletters cannot provide an exhaustive summary of projects and achievements and so I will complement recent editions with information about the following topics:

- Update about the South Downs Local Plan
- Update about A27 highways schemes
- 'Take The Lead' Campaign – to protect livestock and wildlife
- National Park Communications
- Events in the National Park
- Reviewing the South Downs Management Plan
- Annual Teachers' Conference
- More help for local food and drink businesses
- Restoring our heathlands – opportunities for volunteers (and walkers)
- Other practical help
- Local contacts.

Update about the South Downs Local Plan

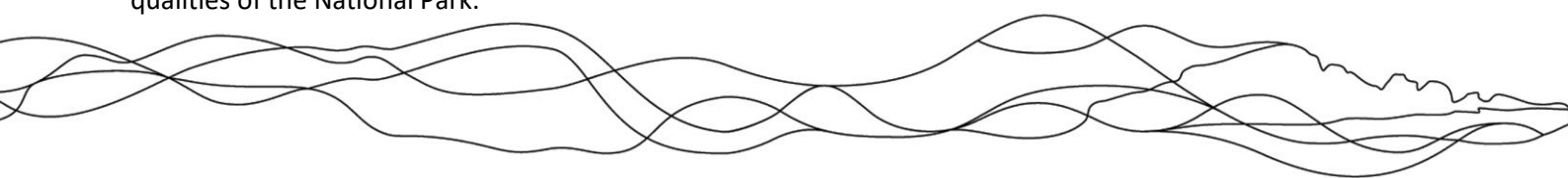
Good progress continues to be made on the first ever plan to cover the National Park in its entirety. Detailed attention is being paid to the overall structure of the plan as well as to the wording of each policy and all the supporting text. Emerging policies have been considered at meetings of the SDNPA Planning Committee with a draft of the entire plan due to be considered on 15th June, for subsequent approval by the full NPA and publication for the formal 'Regulation 19' consultation in September.

The Local Plan aims to put good planning in place that puts landscapes first, cares for views and night skies, supports the local economy, promotes recreation, enables affordable local housing, and makes sure that green spaces are properly valued and cared for. Further details can be found via this link: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/national-park-local-plan/>

Comments received during this consultation will be dealt with by a Planning Inspector in the Examination process. It is hoped that many Parish Councils will write to the Inspector at that time to express their support for policies in the plan. After the Planning inspector has produced his / her report about the Examination, it is anticipated that the Local Plan can be adopted in mid-2018.

Update about A27 highways schemes

The National Park Authority has continued to take part in Highways England consultations about proposed schemes to increase the capacity along the A27. Although the Secretary of State for Transport announced in February that he was cancelling all options for the upgrading at Chichester, there are still prospective schemes at Arundel, Worthing and Lewes to Polegate. This is still, potentially, a major piece of work for the NPA as schemes could have impacts on some of the special qualities of the National Park.



‘Take The Lead’ Campaign – to protect livestock and wildlife

The vast majority of dog owners who use the South Downs are good people who love their animals and wouldn't dream of doing anything to harm the countryside. They bag dog poo and put it in the bin; and keep their pets on a lead or under close control around livestock and when birds are nesting on the ground.

Sadly, some exceptions do some horrendous damage and make the headlines when dogs are let off their leads near to sheep and allowed to run wild.

In all likelihood the dog owners believe that their pets are soft and cuddly members of the family who wouldn't hurt a fly. But they don't have to clear up mauled carcasses, deal with traumatised ewes who may abort their unborn lambs through stress or face the financial impacts on their businesses. They may also not even be aware that a farmer has every right to shoot their pet if caught.

In order to try to help to persuade this minority to stop giving dogs, and their owners, a bad name, the NPA continues to promote its annual [Take the Lead campaign](#) – encouraging responsible dog ownership in the South Downs.

Parish Councils may be able to help spread awareness about this issue.

The NPA website now includes a series of films entitled 'Canine Confessions' where four canine characters are featured, each looking at a real-life issue in different areas of the National Park.

The [Take the Lead campaign](#) website also provides details of a photo competition, a new dog walking ambassador programme and a new layer on the SDNPA discovery map. And people can also [watch an updated animated Take the Lead film here](#)

The NPA is working closely with key partners to spread these important messages right across the National Park. If you know of anyone who would like to hear about this campaign, please send them a link to the website, films and animation etc.

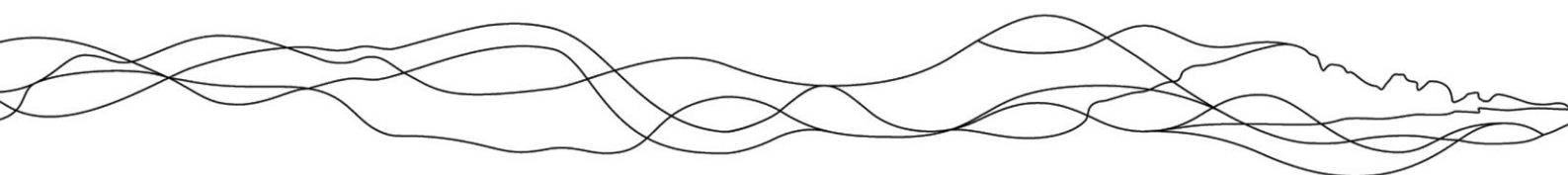
National Park Communications

As well as the new, monthly e-Newsletter (*South Downs News*) for Parish Councils and others, there will be two editions of *South Downs View* this year. The first edition runs from the end of March until September (spring/summer) whilst the second will cover the period from September to the end of February 2018 (autumn/winter). These publications are aimed at residents and visitors of all ages, but especially families. The newspaper covers a huge range of topics from 'on the ground' projects and literary anniversaries to discovery missions and activity suggestions, and it always includes a centre spread map of the National Park with ideas of places to explore on foot or by bicycle. This 24-page free newspaper is now available at a range of visitor attractions, accommodation providers and tourist information points – and there is also an 'on-line' version available here: [South Downs View](#)

If anyone would like to stock this publication, or any other SDNPA leaflets, in their store, B&B, restaurant or other business simply visit [Brochure Connect](#) to order copies.

Events in the National Park

As well as providing details in *South Downs View*, the NPA's website also provides summaries of events (<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/events/>). Communities and organisations can submit events to be included via this link: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/events/submit-event/>



Reviewing the South Downs Management Plan

The latest in the series of Partnership meetings to review the Partnership Management Plan (PMP) heard five short case studies from partners about progress of their own projects under the plan, followed by a group discussion of the barriers to delivery and how we can best overcome them in the next iteration of the PMP. A strong message from the group was that, having correctly set out the scale and range of our ambition in the first five years of the PMP, the next five years should focus on fewer, more measurable shared goals. The more concise and focused we can make the delivery plan, the easier it will be to encourage active buy-in from the widest possible range of partners.

Annual Teachers' Conference

With over 840 schools and nearly 500,000 young people within 10km of the National park – and some 250 outdoor learning providers across the area – the South Downs presents a remarkable opportunity for quality learning outside the classroom.

The 5th annual teachers' conference, held at Plumpton College, played host to over 140 teachers and education providers with the aim of sharing ideas and inspiration about ways to use the South Downs National Park to enhance learning.

Delegates enjoyed keynote presentations from Ian Blackwell at the Natural Connections Project, a 4-year initiative to help school children – particularly those from disadvantaged areas – experience the benefits of the natural environment by empowering teachers to use the outdoors to support everyday learning. This was followed by two physics teachers who provided unusual examples of how physics can be taught outdoors. Delegates also had the chance to attend a choice of 19 hands-on workshops and to talk to education providers in a special 'marketplace', an exciting way of discovering the incredible range of opportunities for schools to visit the national park, to learn about its special qualities and to take learning outside the classroom.

More help for local food and drink businesses

In April, a meeting of the South Downs Food & Drink network was used to launch the 'Local Food Detective', the latest addition to the promotional material available from the South Downs Food online local food directory.

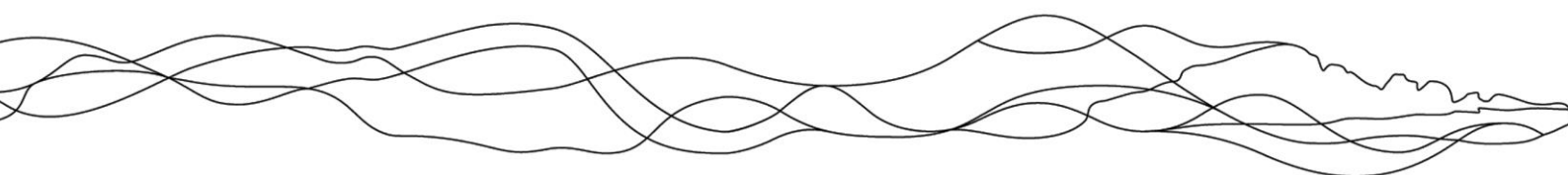
This is a new free service to hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs to help them build their appeal to foodie tourists. The project was awarded a grant from the government's 'Championing British Food Tourism' scheme and is a simple technical tool attached to Southdownsfood.org.

Restoring our heathlands – opportunities for volunteers (and walkers)

Although the South Downs is usually associated with rolling chalk downland, one of the areas most stunning and rarest habitats is the amazing heathland, where striking purple heather is often set against a backdrop of glorious yellow gorse.

Ambitious work to restore and reunite these special areas of rare heathland began in 2016 as part of the Heritage Lottery Funded project, [Heathlands Reunited](#). With a focus on partner and community involvement, this project aims to protect and improve key heathland sites, not only for the rare plants and animals that call them home, but for walkers, birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts alike.

Less than 1 per cent of former heathland remains in the National Park and what's left is fragmented, reducing the diversity of plants and animals that make heaths both interesting and scientifically important. Led by the National Park Authority, with 10 partner organisations, the Heathlands Reunited Project aims to create and improve 41 heathland sites covering an area greater than 1,200 football pitches over the next five years.



To achieve this there are opportunities for volunteer support in wildlife monitoring, practical management and as dog ambassadors. Volunteering in the South Downs National Park is a great way to get outside, meet people and discover new places. Please encourage your parishioners to find out what opportunities and training are available by visiting the [Heathlands Reunited](#) web-page.

The project will also be running a special [guided walk of the Serpent Trail](#), the 66 mile long-distance route which takes in many of the stunning heathland sites in the South Downs, over six consecutive days in July: 17th – 22nd. There is limited availability on each day, so it will be necessary to book places by calling 01730 819320 or by email heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk.

Other practical help

Since my last report (in March) members of the Voluntary Ranger Service have been involved in hundreds of further practical tasks providing thousands of days of volunteer effort and helping to look after the national park.

In May, Hugh Bonneville opened the new 'gateway' building at the Weald & Downland Museum – which had received financial support and help in kind from SDNPA for a new interpretation centre. The display also provides a permanent home for the central part of the 'Secrets of the High Woods' exhibition and is well worth a visit.

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

Local contacts

With the departure of Natalie Fellows, the Planning Link Officer role for East Hampshire parishes is being fulfilled by Nat Belderson: 01730 819307; 07917 602373; nat.belderson@southdowns.gov.uk

The Authority's Western Downs team, based temporarily at Empshott, 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 Countryside & Policy Manager, Nigel James (nigel.james@southdowns.gov.uk) or Rangers Laura Deane (laura.dean@southdowns.gov.uk) or Elaina Whittaker-Slark (Elaina.Slark@southdowns.gov.uk).

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.

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June 2017

