

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 14th June 2018

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.

By coincidence, this note is issued at almost exactly the same time as the next round of workshop meetings for Parish Councillors / Clerks across the National Park. These events are slightly later this year because of Parish Council elections in the Winchester District in May. It was felt best to wait until new Councillors had been elected rather than hold events in the run-up to those elections.

The Hampshire Parishes Workshop takes place on Tuesday 12th June at Hambledon Village Hall (PO7 4RW), starting at 6.45pm with refreshments from 6.30pm. The agenda includes an overview of current SDNPA projects and issues with insights into highways & traffic issues, Whole Estate Plans, Dark Night Skies and rural crime. There will also be a 'market place' format so as to allow delegates time and space to access expert advice on the issues of most direct relevance to their parish. Feedback from the West Sussex event which took place on Wednesday 6th June suggests that this format worked very well.

Parish Clerks and others now receive copies of the SDNPA e-Newsletters (*South Downs News*) and so my notes can be shorter than they were initially. Anyone can sign up here to have the [newsletter delivered to their inbox](#) 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/>.

To complement these other sources I will provide information about the following:

- An update about the South Downs Local Plan
- Achievements of National Park Rangers and Volunteers
- Help for schools, teachers and children
- Major projects affecting the National Park
- Responses to Government Consultations
- Funding for local projects
- Local contacts.

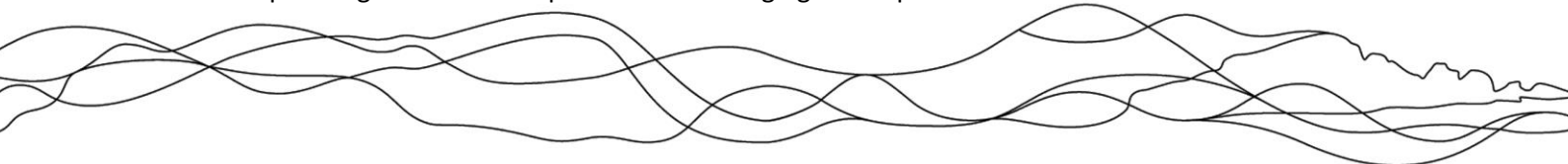
Update on the South Downs Local Plan

After four years, three sets of parish workshops, public roadshows and public consultations (generating more than 10,000 separate comments) the first Local Plan to cover the entire South Downs National Park was submitted to the Government on 27th April. This triggered the start of the examination process, which will finish when the Inspector's final report is received, likely to be in the spring of 2019. Public hearings will be held as part of the examination process.

The Plan sets out policies for the whole of the National Park so that development can be managed in ways to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage for which the Park was created seven years ago. The Plan puts the nationally important landscapes at the heart of planning whilst also allowing communities to flourish, providing better places to live and work.

In developing the plan we have also tried to set out the high standards that all proposed development must meet to protect and value nature – both for its own sake and also for the vital 'eco-system' services it gives us such as clean water, food, wood and space to breathe.

During the past seven years our planners – both within the National Park Authority and working under delegated authority in other local authorities – have been using more than a thousand policies from the 12 local planning authorities responsible for managing development before 2011. The draft Local Plan



will replace these with just 96 policies, consistent across the whole of the Park from the edge of Eastbourne to Winchester.

We have already learnt that an Inspector has been appointed and he will set questions to be answered by the Authority and other interested parties. All outstanding queries will be dealt with at public hearings. The date and locations will be confirmed by the Inspector in due course.

As well as the Local Plan itself the NPA's submissions to Government include all the evidence used in its preparation and more than 2,500 comments received in the final pre-submission consultation held in autumn 2017. All this information is available to view at www.southdowns.gov.uk/localplan. On those pages there are links to:

- the Submission Local Plan (made up of the Pre-Submission Plan and the Schedule of Changes)
- all the comments made on the Pre-Submission Plan (listed by both topic and respondent)
- the Core Document Library (including the Policies Map, Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment).

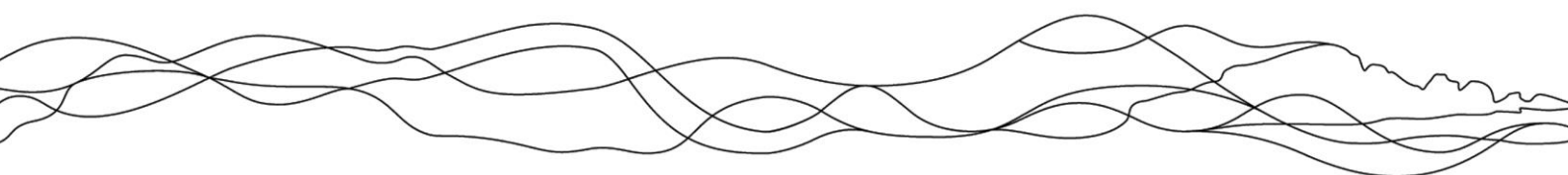
All updates on the Local Plan will be published on the [Examination page](#) including times and dates for public hearings. It can be important to keep an eye on the website particularly during the hearings as the Inspector can make changes at short notice.

On another planning matter, the SDNPA has won another **national award** in London recently for 'Excellence in Planning in Heritage and Culture' for work on the Depot cinema in Lewes. This appears to be another acknowledgement of the quality of the Authority's approach to planning and design, working hard with applicants, agents and the Community to achieve schemes that all can be proud of.

Achievements of National Park Rangers and Volunteers

From meeting with farmers, offering training and support to local communities, leading walks, organising and training volunteers, controlling invasive species and supporting key species, South Downs National Park Rangers are out in the National Park every weekday and many weekends over the year. Don't forget to say hello if you spot them out working. Here's a taste of what they have achieved over the last couple of months:

- Joined three Country Trust days at Bereleigh, Rotherfield and East Tisted estates as part of a continuing partnership with the Hampshire-based charity which brings children unlikely to experience the countryside onto farms to teach them more about nature and food production;
- Supported local farm clusters to help landowners work together to achieve landscape, habitat and biodiversity benefits on a scale that could not be done by working alone;
- Trained eight new volunteers on water vole survey techniques so as to be able to continue to monitor released populations along the River Meon and cut back invasive species at three keys sites along the river to improve plant diversity for recently released water voles;
- Took teachers on site visits to prepare for school visits at the final water vole release in June;
- Carried out 2 South Downs Farmland Bird Initiative surveys to add to this important dataset;
- Installed livestock fencing at Rotherfield Park's meadow to ensure grazing can take place;
- Planted Cowslip plug plants along field margins as part of a project with the Selborne Landscape Partnership: sites chosen due to proximity to Noar Hill, a strong-hold for the nationally rare Duke of Burgundy butterfly;
- Enhanced SSSI conditions at Bentley Station Meadow;
- Attended the Gilbert White Nature Day at Selborne and gave presentations to Parish Councils / Parish AGMs at Binsted, Langrish and Sheet;
- Helped people face up to their fear of cows at the Heathlands Reunited 'Meet the Cattle' event at Liss Forest;
- Began the first of two yearly cut backs to improve access on the South Downs Way;
- Installed a number of kissing gates and replaced more fingerposts on the South Downs Way.



Help for schools, teachers and children

School visits to the National Park are always at their busiest in the summer term and the Authority sent out its summer newsletter to teachers some weeks ago with lots of ideas to get out and about. Parish Councillors may also be interested in these ideas in case they can help their local schools in any way: <https://learning.southdowns.gov.uk/learning/education-team-blog/a-south-downs-way-adventure-for-outdoor-classroom-day-17-may-2018/>

Major projects affecting the National Park

As well as scores of local initiatives, the NPA continues to be consulted on a number of major schemes in the area. In recent months the Authority has responded to proposals for the replacement of the underground Esso pipeline (which feeds Heathrow and Gatwick airports with petrol, diesel and airline fuel from the Fawley refinery near Southampton) and to A27 proposals near Arundel. On the latter it is felt that, by rejecting routes outside the National Park purely on cost grounds, Highways England have not followed due process nor had they provided any detail on mitigation and compensation for any of the routes. The NPA therefore felt that it should commence proceedings for a judicial review to challenge these deficiencies. This decision was not taken lightly and the Authority wants to work with Highways England so that they can find a solution to the traffic issues that also protects the Park for future generations, including having discussions around mitigation and compensation measures.

Responses to Government Consultations

No sooner had the consultation period closed on the proposed amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework (and related Planning Guidance) than Defra launched another important consultation on the contents of the proposed Environmental Principles and Governance Bill.

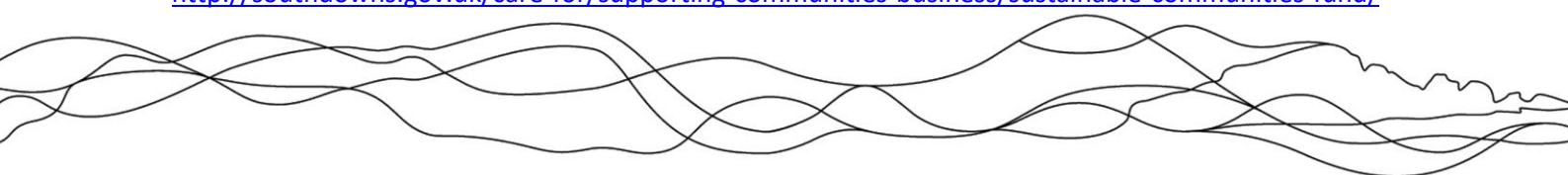
The South Downs National Park Authority joined with all other National Parks in England to submit a comprehensive response to the NPPF amendments. The [original consultation paper can be found here](#) and the [NPE response here](#).

The proposed Environmental Principles and Governance Bill ([details can be found here](#)) will establish an independent environmental watchdog to hold government to account on environmental legislation when all of the protections in EU legislation have been transferred into UK law. The consultation asks about the role of the new body and proposes that Ministers should be required to produce – and then have regard to – a statutory and comprehensive policy statement setting out how they will apply core environmental principles as they develop policy and discharge their responsibilities. Initial reactions from environmental bodies has been that the new watchdog will not have enough teeth as the proposals appear to be limited to issuing advisory notices. It is, however, the purpose of consultations to clarify such points and National Parks will digest all the details before submitting any comments.

Funding for local projects

If your parish has a project that could bring social, environmental, economic or cultural benefits to a community within the National Park and if the project may need some grant funding, you should consider contacting the Sustainable Communities Fund team.

As well as continuing to be a member of the NPA's Planning Committee and Local Access Forum, 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. Grants are available for up to 50% of the project cost from £250 to a maximum of £10,000. More information: <http://southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/supporting-communities-business/sustainable-communities-fund/>



Campaign to reduce attacks by dogs

The NPA continues to promote its 'Take the Lead' messaging through a wide range of communication channels and is working with partners to take up additional opportunities such as sharing its videos with partners to show at their sites and at 'Film on a Farm' events taking place this summer.

The next phase of the campaign is to target dog owners through veterinary practices and other services dog owners may use. Veterinary practices will stock SDNPA information leaflets and discussions have also commenced with a large dog insurance provider to promote messages to their customers. Other similar opportunities will also be explored.

The aim is to build up towards a larger campaign around dog worrying early in 2019 based around the idea of 'Do you know where your dog is?', highlighting that many dog attacks happen at night when a dog may have escaped from home without their owner noticing. The NPA hopes to gather more involvement from farmers and create material with them as spokespeople.

Local contacts

The Planning Link Officer role for East Hampshire is still being covered by both Nat Belderson and Hannah Chapman. In the first instance, queries can be sent to Hannah, who will refer to Nat where necessary. Hannah.Chapman@southdowns.gov.uk and 01730 819270; Nat.Belderson@southdowns.gov.uk and 01730 819307.

The Authority's Western Downs team, currently 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 Lead Ranger Elaina Whittaker-Slark (elaina.whittaker-slark@southdowns.gov.uk), 01730 819340 and 01420 538295 or mobile 07557 923842.

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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8th June 2018

