

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

I have been a Member of the National Park Authority for almost two months now and I am beginning to get my feet under the table ...

Although my role is to act in the best interests of the whole of the National Park, I will want to try 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.

I plan to provide regular reports for EHAPTC meetings and I have also met with Sue Halstead and others to explore the idea of arranging special opportunities for parishes to meet with National Park officers on a regular basis. We are looking to try to arrange such a meeting for late May.

This note provides information about current activities and forthcoming events - but begins with a summary of how the National Park's officers handle work within this area:

- The Hampshire part of the South Downs is overseen by the **Western Area team** based at Queen Elizabeth Country Park (QECF). The team consist of an area manager and three rangers all with their own specific areas of work and expertise. Interestingly, over a third of the National Park is within Hampshire and the team cover a broad remit as the 'first stop shop' to communities and land managers through advice and support to achieve the national park's purposes. As well as the 'eyes and ears' on the ground the team assist with projects and activities and the last twelve months have seen achievements such as supporting community conservation groups, archaeological surveys for landowners, binoculars for school children learning about the South Downs at QECF, working closely with farmers on environmental stewardship and assisting a community group to enhance and restore the River Meon. The rangers for the East Hampshire District areas within the South Downs are Dan Oakley and Rob Nicholls. Please contact nick.heasman@southdowns.gov.uk 02392571381 for further information on how the South Downs National Park Authority can help your community
- The National Park Authority (NPA) 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 important 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.

Over the next few months the NPA will be developing a **Management Plan** for the entire South Downs in conjunction with a wide range of partner organisations. Inputs from Parish Councils will be very helpful throughout this work and updates will always be available on the NPA's website and via the 'Forum' pages. Next steps in this work include agreeing a 'vision' for the National Park and a 'State of the Park Report' which will provide a snapshot against which progress can be measured over the years ahead.

The NPA is keen to try to help Parish Councils with the concept of **Neighbourhood Plans**: aiming to help communities decide upon the merits of undertaking such plans and with ideas for how they might be conducted. The National Park Authority is arranging a special workshop on this topic at Cowdray (Midhurst) on the afternoon of Thursday 29th March (2-5pm). For more information or to book a place please contact Andrew Triggs on 01730 811759 or andrew.triggs@southdowns.gov.uk.

Finally I would like to draw the attention of Parish Councils to a new consultation exercise, recently launched by Defra to review **the governance arrangements of National Parks**. Amongst other things, the Government is proposing to change primary legislation to remove the need for the Secretary of State to appoint parish members, with the potential that they be replaced by directly elected individuals. The South Downs National Park Authority has already explained to Government that, as it is still a very new organisation, it would like to continue with its present governance arrangements at this time as it is making very serious attempts to make sure that all its arrangements work well from the outset. Parish Councils may also wish to submit their views on these matters. The full consultation paper is available to view at www.defra.gov.uk/consult/2012/03/08/national-park-governance-1203/ and responses should be sent to governance.consultation@defra.gov.uk by 31st May 2012 at the latest.

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