

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 26th March 2014

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.

Partnership Management Plan

Following inputs and ideas from Parish Councils and a wide range of other interested parties, the first ever Management Plan for the National Park was published at the end of January. The plan describes how people would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 11 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to turn the vision and outcomes into reality.

The Plan identifies particular areas for action over the next five years and it is designed to stimulate local action, influence the major streams of public and private investment into the National Park, and align with the policies and programmes of other public bodies. All Parish Councils with land in the National Park will have received a copy but it can also be seen at: http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/409799/SD_ManPlan__2013_15.pdf

The NPA is grateful to all Parish Councils who have played an active part in helping to shape the contents of the plan – and there will be lots of opportunities for communities to help to deliver some of the important policies in it over the years ahead...

South Downs National Park Local Plan and Community Infrastructure Levy

Even before work on the Management Plan had finished, work to produce the first ever Local Plan (dealing with land use and planning policies) had commenced and a consultation exercise on Options for the Local Plan was launched at the end of February.

This consultation runs until the end of Wednesday 30th April and Parish Councils will already have received full details. In addition, a well-attended workshop meeting for Parish Council representatives was held in East Meon on 11th March to help highlight the opportunities and importance of responding.

This 'Options Consultation' stage is the first stage in developing a Local Plan and it asks for views on the approach that the plan should take on various planning issues. Over 50 key issues have been identified – along with a number of options for how the Local Plan could deal with them. Issues addressed include: landscape, cultural heritage, settlement strategy, housing, design, gypsy & travellers, community facilities, transport, and economy & tourism.

Parish Councils will also want to consider whether any important issues have been omitted from the Consultation Document (as well as commenting on the options described in it).

At this stage, the Local Plan work will not include draft policies or be site specific (with no reference to potential allocations) but responses from this 'Options' stage will help to determine what the policies and development allocations might be. Draft local plan policies and proposed allocations will be included in a subsequent stage (Preferred Option) on which views will be sought in early 2015. The SDNP Local Plan will supercede the Joint Core Strategies and inherited plans once adopted – scheduled for 2017.

The views of Parish Councils are very important at this early stage of the plan-making process and it is hoped that most (if not all) Parish Councils will respond to the consultation.

At the same time Parish Councils will be able to comment on suggested levels of contribution that developers should pay in the form of **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** to meet needs for new infrastructure caused by their developments.

Both the Local Plan Options and Preliminary Draft CIL Charging Schedule are available to read and comment on until 30 April 2014 at www.southdowns.gov.uk/localplan

Other planning issues

The Inspector's report on the East Hampshire **Joint Core Strategy** is expected in late March.

Following representations made to Government it was pleasing to learn recently that National Parks will be exempt from proposals to extend **permitted development rights**. The Government recognises that the South Downs is a precious landscape where development is already properly managed through the local planning system.

David Townsend is now the National Park's '**Link Officer**' for any planning application matters in East Hampshire. Like his predecessor in this position, Nat Belderson, David is keen to encourage any Parish Councils to raise any issues about any planning applications with him, even if the decision is due to be taken by East Hampshire DC as part of the Park's delegated arrangements. David can be contacted via david.townsend@southdowns.gov.uk and on 01730 234130.

Local area news

Nick Heasman continues to lead our local 'Western Downs' team based at the Queen Elizabeth Country Park, acting 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.

Recent highlights include a special 'Farmers breakfast meeting' at Langrish to discuss issues and closer working with the authority and work is well underway to complete the Shipwrights Way with sculptures to mark the route and its local heritage now being installed: <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/shipwrightsway/shipwrightsway-sculptures.htm>

Other projects supported by the team recently include the management of chalk grassland through scrub clearance and fencing, hedge restoration, installation of barn owl boxes and celebrating the Saxon heritage of the Meon Valley <http://www.saxonsinthemeonvalley.org.uk/>

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 or 02392 572615.

Grants available and other news

- More and more communities are taking advantage of grants available from the NPA's '**Sustainable Communities Fund**' (SCF). Parish Councils, voluntary groups, partnerships and others can apply for funding for non-profit making projects that bring environmental, social, economic or cultural benefits to communities within the Park. Recent awards include over £1,000 for the Hawkley History Group to help with a community study of the history of Hawkley, Empshott and Priors Dean.

- The SCF grants are available for up to 60 per cent of the project cost from £250 to a maximum of £20,000. More information about the fund is available at www.southdowns.gov.uk/communities/funding/sustainable-communities-fund and enquiries can be made via Mark Rose on grants@southdowns.gov.uk or 01730-811755.
- It is hoped that the National Park Authority will be successful in its bid for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to improve **heathland**. The project, which involves 13 organisations working in partnership, will deliver bigger, better, more and joined up heathland in the National Park. It will also enable close working with local communities to help them understand and value heathlands.
- The National Park Authority is starting some work about **Broadband**. The work is designed to develop a strong business case to BT (in conjunction with the County Councils) with the aim of increasing superfast broadband coverage by 2017
- In a **seasonal campaign** organised by the National Park Authority, bus and train operators are joining together with a range of visitor attractions to provide “2 for 1” offers to encourage more people to travel by public transport. The campaign, which runs until 30th April, builds upon the success of a similar initiative in a pilot area last year. Details are available on-line at: <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/gettingaround/2-for-1-at-thirteen-of-your-favourite-attractions>

Although my role is to act in the best interests of the whole of the National Park, I want to continue 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
doug.jones@southdowns.gov.uk *21st March 2014*