

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting

8th March 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 monthly SDNPA e-Newsletters (*South Downs News*), my notes can be shorter than they were initially. The new monthly e-newsletter is circulated at the beginning of every month and past issues 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/>. People can sign up to having the [newsletter delivered to their inbox](#) every month.

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:

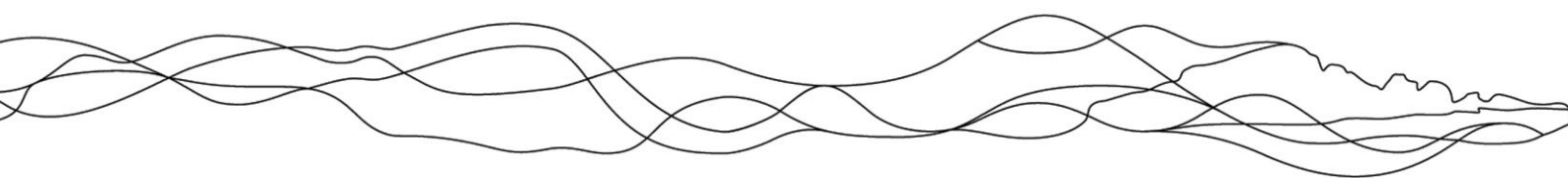
- Update about the South Downs Local Plan
- Housing White Paper and Affordable Homes
- Dark Skies Festival
- 'Take The Lead' Campaign – to protect livestock and wildlife
- National Park Communications
- Events in the National Park
- New on-line resources for businesses and communities
- Update about A27 highways schemes
- Sales of Council Land Holdings
- Championing our water supplies
- Other practical work 'on the ground'
- Sustainable Communities Fund Grants
- Local contacts.

Update about the South Downs Local Plan

Good progress continues to be made on the first ever local 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 of its policies and supporting text. Emerging policies are being considered at each meeting of the Authority's Planning Committee with a draft of the entire plan due to be considered in 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/>

Parts of the evidence base for the new Local Plan will be a Green Infrastructure Framework: a network of interconnected habitats linking to green corridors and buffer zones. This network will provide environmental benefits as well as helping with quality of life and the local economy. It can potentially be delivered through a range of mechanisms including planning gain, agriculture payments, work with water companies etc.



Any comments received during the 'Regulation 19' consultation will be dealt with by the Planning Inspector via 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.

Following the examination it is hoped that a sound Local Plan can be adopted in mid-2018 with a full suite of park wide policies. However, the recent Housing White Paper suggests that the NPA may need to review the Local Plan fairly soon after it has been adopted and, in any event, produce a new one within five years.

Housing White Paper and Affordable Homes

On 7 February the Government published its long-awaited White Paper, "Fixing our Broken Housing Market". Proposals to mend it include making sure that more land is allocated for homes in areas where people want to live and investing in the planning system to make it more open and accessible. There are also plans to make it clearer how planning restrictions apply in special areas such as national parks and ancient woodland; an emphasis on the design of new homes; and an aim to diversify the housing market and increase provision of affordable homes.

All of these issues link directly to the NPA's ambitions for the future of the National Park, both in terms of the emerging Local Plan and specific ambitions to support more affordable housing. But there is a huge amount of detail to digest in the White Paper and the SDNPA will be making a response to the consultation in due course.

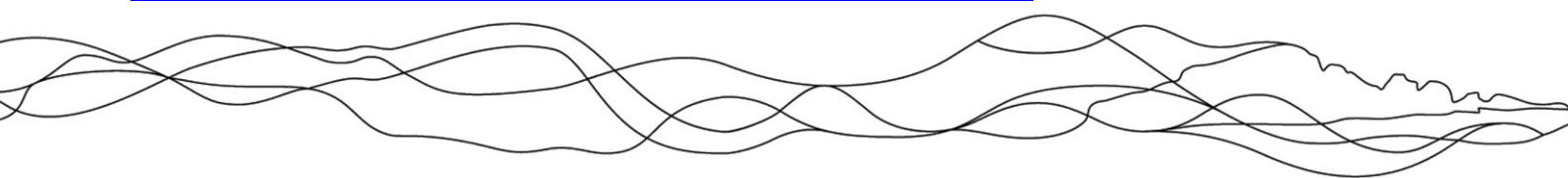
At a special conference at the start of February the NPA brought together landowners, rural housing providers, planners and specialist legal and financial experts to look at ways for unused land and buildings to provide for affordable housing in the National Park. It was acknowledged that private developers do not normally build affordable homes off their own back. The large financial risks they take on with a development have to be balanced with their anticipated profits. It is up to local housing authorities and planning authorities, like the South Downs National Park Authority, to find a way to meet the local community's need for affordable places to live and the developer's need to make a reasonable profit.

While the new White Paper proposes a minimum of 10% affordable homes on new housing sites of more than 10 units, the NPA thinks that it might be able to go further – perhaps setting out a requirement for 50% on all but the smallest housing developments. Another area where the NPA may be able to make a difference is on small scale rural exception sites: places where development could only be permitted on the provision that homes are both affordable and guaranteed to remain in the community for perpetuity.

The NPA's work also recognises that the design of homes will be important, exploring how local materials can be used to create high-quality standard designs that fit with what's already there, are sustainable and reduce construction costs. The NPA is also looking at how it might establish its own affordable housing enabling service to support landowners and providers interested in increasing the supply of affordable homes. To find out more about SDNPA work on affordable housing contact affordablehomes@southdowns.gov.uk

Dark Skies Festival

The National Park's first 'Dark Skies Festival' ran from 10th – 26th February to celebrate the new South Downs International Dark Skies Reserve designation. About twenty star gazing events were planned across the National Park during the school half-term period providing opportunities for experts to show-off our skies, share tips on how to enjoy them and explain why they are worth protecting. The festival attracted a great deal of media interest with features on BBC Countryfile on 5th March and in the Daily Telegraph: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/united-kingdom/england/articles/south-downs-national-park-dark-skies-stargazing/>



‘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. Recently it has been the turn of Malling Down Nature Reserve near Lewes where a total of ten sheep have been killed in the past couple of months by dogs allowed to run wild.

In all likelihood the owners of the dogs involved believe 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.

The South Downs is also home to many ground-nesting birds – particularly nightjars and any disturbance while the hen is sitting on eggs can end the chances of a successful brood.

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

A new section of the NPA website includes a series of films entitled 'Canine Confessions'. Four canine characters have been developed and filmed, each looking at a real-life issue in different areas of the National Park. The first two new films were launched on 6 March, featuring Candice, a dog who has an issue with ground nesting birds, and Frazzles, a woolly terrier who likes sheep 'just a little too much'. Separate short films will introduce the real dogs and share tips from their owners.

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](#)

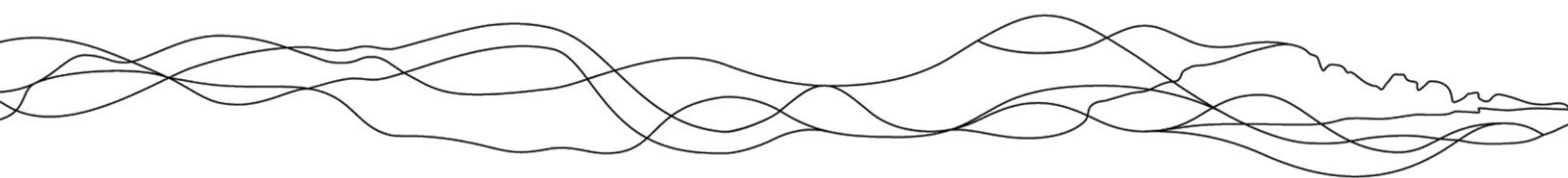
The NPA is working closely with key partners to spread these important messages right across the National Park. If anyone know of anyone who would like to hear about this campaign please send them a link to the website, films and animation etc.

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 will run 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). This publication is 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 bike. This publication is very much about the National Park and what people can discover when they visit.

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/>



New on-line resources for businesses and communities

"Communicating the South Downs" is a new online resource packed with photos, branding and tips, all free to use for marketing services to visitors or getting people more involved in local communities. The materials include free access to the National Park's place branding and images – as long as their use does not contradict the purposes and duty of the National Park.

Examples of potential uses might include: Bed & Breakfast establishments wishing to attract more winter visitors because of the new International Dark Skies Reserve status can find tips on stargazing to share with their customers; cafes can use the National Park's place brand to demonstrate the provenance of their menus; or a Parish Council might wish to use some of the stunning photos to inspire local residents to get involved with community activities.

Visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/communicating-south-downs/ to find out more and feel free to send the link to anyone who you think would like to register.

There is also an increasing amount of information about local businesses on the 'South Downs Food' website: <http://www.southdownsfood.org/delicious-breaks-in-the-south-downs-national-park/>. The site helps people visit and buy from local suppliers with the [Food Finder](#) application helping to identify a wide range of local foods and drinks.

Implications of Brexit

The SDNPA has noted the two principal recommendations of the Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into the implications of Brexit: (1) for a UK Environment Protection Act to ensure that UK regulation after Brexit is at least as strong, if not stronger, than that afforded by the Habitats Directive and other key European legislation; and (2) the need for clarity about the sort of land management payments scheme which could replace the CAP.

The NPA is in contact with other National Parks, with Defra, Natural England and the NFU/CLA about possible future scenarios for farm support and advice, with the NPA's successful farm cluster model (which covers about two-thirds of the National Park) offering the potential to help pilot innovative new land management funding and advice services.

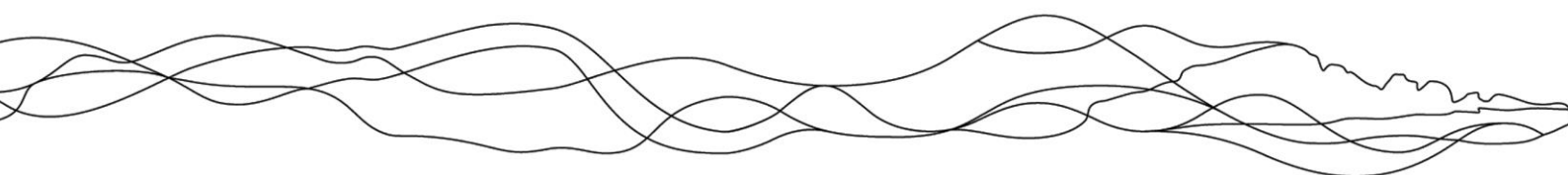
Update about A27 highways schemes

The National Park Authority has continued to take part in Highways England consultations about proposed schemes along the A27 including at Chichester, Arundel, Worthing and Lewes - Polegate. This is, potentially, a major piece of work for the NPA for a couple of years as the schemes could have impacts on some of the special qualities of the National Park. The Authority has been trying to assess the impacts of the road proposals as a whole, rather than as a series of separate schemes.

At the end of February the Secretary of State for Transport wrote to the Chief Executive of Highways England to say that he was cancelling all options for the upgrading of the A27 at Chichester. A great deal of time and money had been spent on this work and it is to be hoped that some valuable lessons can be drawn to help avoid similar positions in the future.

South Downs National Park featured on TV

In the last few weeks the South Downs (and some of the work of the NPA) has been featured on TV. A BBC 4 programme, 'South Downs – England's Mountains Green', showed some beautiful views of some of the splendid scenery in the National Park and drew attention to some of the special cultural heritage and biodiversity. The programme is available to [watch on BBC i-player](#) for 28 days from February 21st. More recently BBC Countryfile has also featured the National Park with a focus on the South Downs Way and the Dark Night Skies.



Sales of Council Land Holdings

Eastbourne Borough Council is the latest local authority to consider selling some of its land holdings with a view to avoiding cuts to services or increases in council tax. SDNPA officers are trying to work with the Council to highlight the benefits to the local economy of these land holdings (which were purchased in 1929 so that they would be 'saved for ever from building or other exploitation') as an alternative to the benefits of a one-off capital injection. The NPA understands the financial pressures that Local Authorities now face but it is felt that, in many places, the landscape is one of the main drivers of the local economy that councils are trying to stimulate.

Championing our water supplies

Most people living in this area probably have the chalk of the South Downs to thank for their water supply – but this amazing natural resource is under some threats, with some areas failing water quality standards due to rising trends of nitrate in groundwater and risks associated with pesticides, turbidity, oils and solvents in both urban and rural environments.

The Brighton Chalk area (between the Rivers Adur and Ouse) is now classified as 'poor status' due to rising trends of nitrates and the NPA is therefore working with a number of other organisations to reduce leaching rates through farm engagement: providing practical advice and improvements to land management; raising public and land manager awareness; and undertaking monitoring.

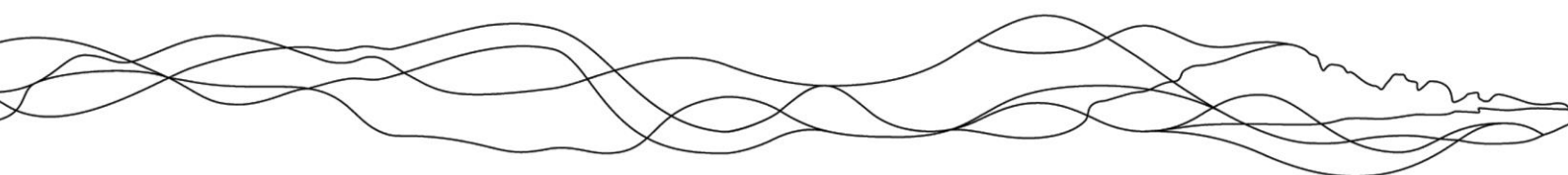
The project represents a 'catchment management initiative' – a more sustainable way of helping to improve groundwater quality and ensure good quality drinking water. It aims to tackle diffuse pollution at source before it reaches the aquifers (and before it reaches the water company's treatment works) so that it represents a low cost solution for customers. More details are available here: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/championing-our-water/>

Other practical help 'on the ground'

Since my last report (in November) members of the Voluntary Ranger Service have been involved in hundreds of further practical, promotional and training tasks providing thousands of days of volunteer effort.

As always, chalk grassland and heathland scrub clearance forms the biggest area of work at this time of year but here is a taste of other achievements:

- Installation of new tramper friendly kissing gates to improve access at Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve
- Repairs to fences to enable cattle to graze and installation of new water troughs to support grazing at other Nature Reserves in West Sussex
- Clearing small pockets of birch and pine trees in heathland areas as part of developing a network of heath wildlife corridors.
- Coppicing at a number of sites across the National Park to support the pearl bordered fritillary and ancient semi-natural woodland
- Clearing invasive vegetation from a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments above Cocking in West Sussex
- Commencing annual monitoring for harvest mice nests in the Selbourne area
- Constructing and installing 'cages' to protect juniper bushes from browsing livestock and deer on a site in the Central Downs area. Once relatively common on the Downs, juniper is now very rare and needs careful management and protection to secure its future.
- Installing new fingerposts on the South Downs Way.



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.

Recent awards have included contributions towards a pond dipping platform at Woods Mill Nature Reserve (a grant of £2,000), towards interpretation materials for a community hub at Droxford church (a grant of £10,000), towards the production of a booklet to help parents and teachers to engage children on the autistic spectrum with the Special Qualities of the South Downs countryside (£2,500) and a grant of £1,500 towards the creation of outdoor learning space (and purchase of equipment) at West Meon Primary School.

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

- Natalie Fellows, the Planning Link Officer for Hampshire parishes, can be contacted via: 07872 410442 and natalie.fellows@southdowns.gov.uk
- The Authority's Western Downs team has moved, on a temporary basis (probably 2-3 years), to Empshott. The team 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.

Doug Jones, Member of the South Downs National Park Authority and Buriton Parish Council
doug.jones@southdowns.gov.uk

March 2107

