

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 14th March 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.

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. People 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 recent editions of *South Downs News* I will provide information about the following:

- Update about the South Downs Local Plan
- The SDNPA Design Review Panel
- The National Park's 'Learning Zone' for teachers
- SDNPA Heathlands Work
- The future of farming
- Protecting our water supplies
- Funding for local projects
- Other practical help
- Local contacts.

I can also give advance notice that the next round of workshop meetings for Parish Councillors / Clerks across the National Park (including one designed for the East Hampshire and Winchester areas) will take place towards the end of May. These events are slightly later this year because of Parish Council elections in the Winchester District in May. It is felt best to wait until new Councillors have been elected rather than hold events in the run-up to these elections.

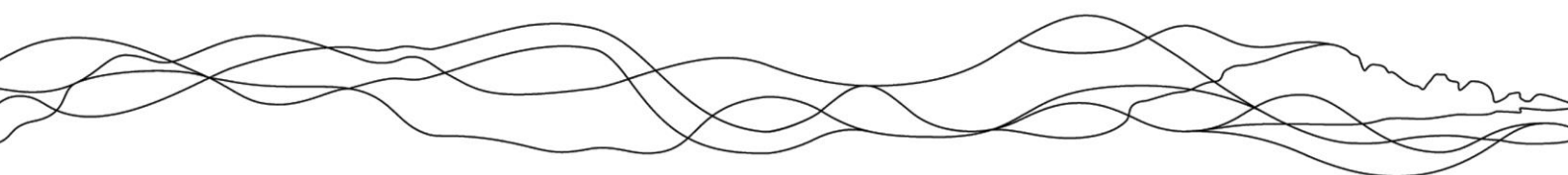
Update about the South Downs Local Plan

The public consultation on the Pre-Submission version of the Local Plan ran from 26 September to 21 November 2017. About 570 organisations and individuals submitted comments, totaling to almost 2,500 representations. Analysis of issues arising from these representation is now almost completed and is likely to lead some modifications to policy wording and supporting text in the plan which will all be considered at the full National Park Authority meeting on 22 March.

The plan will then be submitted for independent examination along with all the representations made and all the evidence supporting the plan. All the comments received during the consultation period will be published shortly before or at submission.

As part of the independent examination of the plan, a public hearing will be held and is likely to run for up to two weeks. This is likely to be in the SDNPA's Memorial Hall in Midhurst at some time in June / July. If the plan is found to be 'sound', the NPA can then adopt the Local Plan, which would then replace over one thousand local plan policies currently operating in the National Park.

The plan, the first ever plan to cover the National Park in its entirety, aims to set a framework for good planning, with an emphasis on the landscape, caring for views and night skies, supporting the local economy, promoting recreation, enabling affordable local housing, and making sure that green spaces are properly valued and cared for.



Parish Councils may wish to note the content of paragraph 216 of the NPPF which may be relevant to the consideration of planning applications in the meantime. This states that: *From the day of publication, decision-takers may also give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to:*

- *the stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced the preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);*
- *the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given);*
- and ● *the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to the policies in this Framework (the closer the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given).*

The SDNPA Design Review Panel

Soon after the creation of the National Park, the NPA established an independent panel of expert architects and designers who continue to give up their time to push for better design in the area. Their belief is that it is a privilege to be allowed to build in a National Park, that people should see it as such and hence design buildings that both respond to and make a real contribution to the landscapes.

Graham Morrison, Vice Chair of the SDNPA Design Review Panel, recently received an OBE for services to architecture and he explains that “People often see planning authorities as there to prevent the bad. That’s not enough, we want to promote the good.”

Chairman, Mark Penfold, describes the Panel as “critical friends to the SDNPA: here to help applicants and the National Park Authority bring forward the kind of schemes the National Park deserves.”

While panel’s role is purely advisory, their comments carry a lot of weight. Their reports are addressed in planning committee reports and may be used at public enquiry. Their inputs have also led to some award-winning schemes within the National Park. Although not every scheme can be an exemplar, the Panel expects people to produce the best possible schemes that they can.

There is a huge breadth of expertise held by the different panel members, who meet once a month to look at three or four schemes, and they all give their time to the National Park for free. They sometimes run workshop sessions (either requested by the applicants or suggested by the Panel) and these can provide an amazing resource.

Panel Members get a feeling that they are not just dealing with the individual schemes in front of them, but that they are part of a bigger picture, showing the contribution that design can make to place making. Members of the SDNPA Planning Committee regularly give up their time to sit in on the Panel Meetings as well – listening and observing the discussions – which the Panel Members feel shows great commitment and interest. You can find out more here: [Design Review Panel](#)

The National Park’s ‘Learning Zone’ for teachers

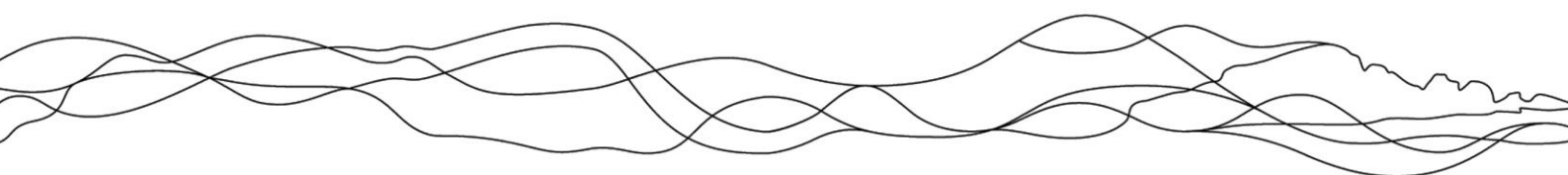
The Learning Zone is packed full of locally-relevant resources ready for teachers to use across the entire curriculum and is something which Parish Councils can draw to the attention of local schools – whether they are inside the National Park or not.

South Downs Education Officer Jonathan Dean has recently described five ways the National Park can inspire classes this spring and beyond and his ideas can be found here:

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/teachers-are-you-using-us-enough/>

SDNPA Heathlands Work

Many people love their heaths – using them for exercise, to walk their dogs, for play and for relaxation – and through the SDNPA’s ‘Heathlands Reunited’ project it is hoped that more and more people will take an interest in these amazingly rich havens.



Over the past six months communities have been sharing their stories about the history and heritage of their local heathlands to help inspire seven new pieces of art, as part of the Heritage Lottery-Funded project, and to create a record of traditions in years gone by.

The work will link seven heathland sites, just across the county boundary into West Sussex, to tell the story of why heaths are so important – not just as individual commons but as part of a wider network of heathland. These heathlands include: Wiggonholt, Iping and Stedham, Lavington Plantation, Short heath Common, Graffham, Black Down and Woolbeding.

If you would like to find out more, volunteer or have stories that you would like to share please contact heathlands@southdowns.gov.uk

The future of farming

Farming makes up 85 per cent of the South Downs National Park's landscapes and so whatever happens to farming in the future (including our exit from the European Union) it could have significant impacts on the National Park.

Nigel James, the SDNPA's Countryside and Policy Managers based in East Hampshire, is also the lead for all the National Park's work on the future of farming in the South Downs and he has recently provided some information about the National Park's work in this area, here:

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/asked-nigel-james-countryside-policy-manager-farming-south-downs/>

Protecting our water supplies

The chalk aquifer under the South Downs provides water to 1.2 million people but, like many aquifers and rivers across the world, it is polluted with nitrates from fertilisers, manure heaps and road run-off.

Winter is a vulnerable time for water pollution in the National Park as bare fields and higher rainfall allow more nitrates in soil to leach through into the water. The National Park Authority is a lead partner in the Brighton ChaMP project, which is working with two farmers to test a new method for helping to protect our drinking water using a system called 'cover crops'.

Six different crops have been planted on two fields that might otherwise be left bare over the winter, together with a control area which has been left bare. Researchers are going out regularly to test which plants are taking up the most nitrates.

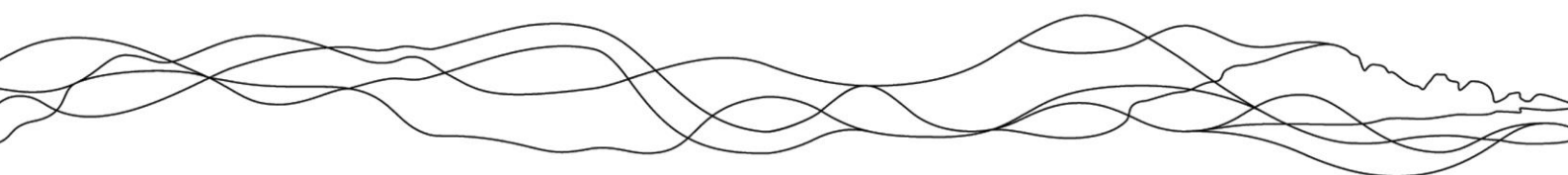
Some other trials suggest that cover crops can increase slug numbers which would be bad news for water – more slugs might mean that farmers need to use more pesticides – but there are also reports which suggest that cover crops help to increase numbers of natural slug predators. The SDNPA's work will help to provide much-needed evidence so we don't see a situation where one type of pollution is swapped for another.

Although conclusive results are not yet available, early findings suggested that there were similar numbers of slugs on the control area as in the cover-crops which might suggest that the crops don't increase their numbers.

Other trials have seen a reduction in nitrate leaching of up to 59% and, in some European countries, cover crops are now compulsory in areas where drinking water is particularly vulnerable.

Water companies have to monitor supplies carefully. If nitrate levels rise above 50mg per litre then water no longer meets the Drinking Water Standard and can't be supplied to homes.

There are more details about this interesting and important project here: [Brighton ChaMP for Water project](#)



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/>

Other practical help

Since my last report the NPA's Area Team and members of the Voluntary Ranger Service (VRS) have been involved in hundreds of further practical tasks providing thousands of days of volunteer effort and helping to look after the national park, including:

- Starting building barn owl boxes ahead of the nesting season and confirming how to check barn owl boxes with an ecologist from the Hawk Conservancy
- Staying up late to support stargazing events as part of our South Downs Dark Night Skies Festival and getting up early to help run the SDNPA's annual Farmers' Breakfast events
- Clearing scrub at a number of SSSI and SINC locations and tidying brambles, rhododendron, dead birch and other trees in a number of places
- Working with Butterfly Conservation to improve habitat for the nationally threatened Duke of Burgundy butterfly and undertaking seasonal work at other locations to improve the habitat for the rare pearl bordered fritillary
- Coppicing hazel, supporting landowners with woodland management
- Giving advice to local conservation groups and training on hedgerow management to farmers

Please don't forget to say hello if you spot rangers or volunteers out working in the National Park!

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.

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

March 2018

