

## **SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK**

### **Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 29<sup>th</sup> November 2016**

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 now receive regular Highlights of SDNPA work, my notes can be shorter than they were initially. The NPA's Highlights note is not an exhaustive list of achievements, but selects some of the projects that the Authority and its partners are working on. To complement those notes I will focus primarily on the following topics:

- Update about the South Downs Local Plan
- Consultation about A27 highways schemes
- 'Secrets of the High Woods'
- The new 'Heathlands Reunited' Project
- Other practical help 'on the ground'
- Dark Skies Festival
- Cycling and walking initiatives
- 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.

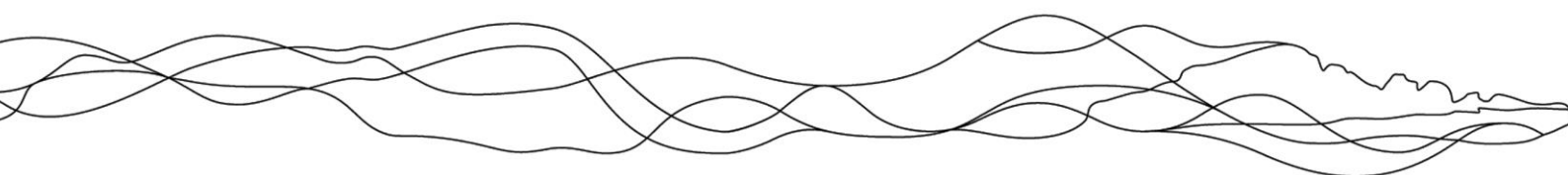
The recent workshops for Parish Councils earlier this month attracted record numbers of people and enabled NPA officers to share emerging Local Plan allocations and designations (Local Green Spaces, Settlement Policy Boundaries and potential sites for employment, housing and Gypsy & Travellers). All of these are still 'work in progress' and do not constitute a definitive list. Reactions and responses are sought from Parish Councils by 9<sup>th</sup> January.

Work in the new year will see analysis of comments from Parish and Town Councils as well as consultations with statutory bodies to ensure that there are no insurmountable problems. Emerging policies will be 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.

New officers are now in place to help take this work forward with Matt Bates as the new Local Plan Lead and Kate Stuart as the new Senior Planner; both reporting to Lucy Howard and to the Director of Planning, Tim Slaney.

#### **Consultation about A27 highways schemes**

The National Park Authority is taking part in Highways England consultations about a number of proposed schemes along the A27 including at Chichester, Arundel, Worthing and between Lewes and Polegate. This could be a major piece of work for the next couple of years as all the schemes could have impacts on some of the special qualities of the National Park. The Authority will be keen to obtain the best possible outcome with any adverse effects being suitably mitigated.



## **‘Secrets of the High Woods’**

As reported in September, some exciting discoveries have been made in the National Park as part of a cutting-edge archaeology project. The discoveries were made after airborne laser scanning (LiDAR) was used to map places that have been hidden under woodland for hundreds of years; part of the three-year *Secrets of the High Woods* project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Findings from the research are now being shared through a touring interactive exhibition which is currently at the Queen Elizabeth Country Park until 30th November. The exhibition includes interactive CGI re-creations, augmented reality animations and an intriguing ‘memory tree’ to listen to: all of which help explain how this remarkable landscape has changed over time.

A book about the project is being launched on 30<sup>th</sup> November, there is a short film (available here: [project film](#)) and more details can be found via these links:

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/discover/heritage/secrets-of-the-high-woods/> and

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/TheHighWoodsfromaboveNationalMappingProgramme.pdf>

Two learning packs are being created to help schools engage with the project: including cross-curricular activities covering a range of subjects and links to outdoor learning providers.

## **The new ‘Heathlands Reunited’ project – can you help?**

Heathland covers just 1% of the South Downs National Park, mostly separated into ‘islands’ where isolated plants and animals are far more likely to be vulnerable to local extinction.

The Heathlands Reunited project, led by the National Park Authority and supported by 10 partners, aims to create new and improve existing heathland at over forty sites over the next five years. Most of these sites are relatively close to Petersfield: to the north and east of the town.

As well as restoring, expanding and reconnecting threatened heathland habitats the project (which has been awarded a £1.4 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund) is aiming to enthuse and inspire people to visit them, learn more about them and use them responsibly and sustainably.

The project will offer a variety of voluntary and training opportunities and Parish Councils may be able to draw details to the attention of parishioners. Details are attached at the end of this note.

## **Other practical help ‘on the ground’**

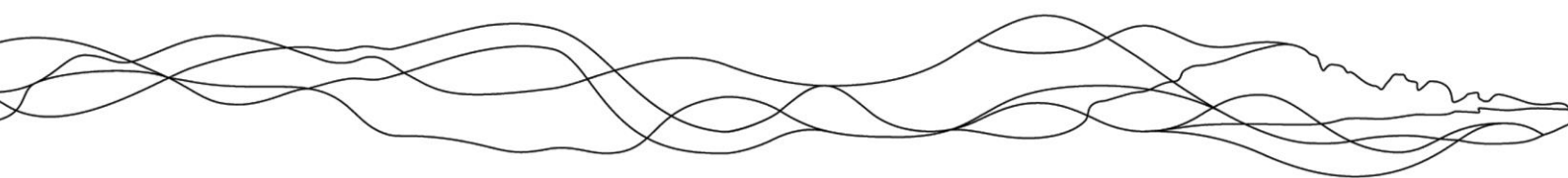
Since my last report (in September) members of the Voluntary Ranger Service have been involved in about 200 practical, promotional and training tasks providing about 1,000 days of volunteer effort.

With the end of the nesting season, scrub bashing restarted during September and the woodland management season is now also well under way.

The Arun and Rother Connections project won a prestigious national ‘Campaign for National Parks: Park Protector Award’ recently. Over 1,100 local volunteers have helped to restore a range of wetland habitats and promoted a rich and thriving river system. And people have also been engaged as ‘Citizen Scientists’, using an App developed by the project to record the plants and wildlife that they have seen in local green spaces.

## **Cycling and Walking**

There has been more progress on a network of cycling and walking routes in the National Park with the recent opening of the new link between Petersfield and the Queen Elizabeth Country Park (enabling a circular route to / from either location in combination with the Shipwrights Way via



Buriton) and with consultants appointed to prepare the next phase of the Centurion Way between West Dean and the South Downs Way at Cocking.

A new walking booklet has been published featuring 12 walks along the South Downs Way: each based around public transport enabling users to take the bus or train at either end of the walk.

### **Dark Skies Festival**

Plans are being made for a 'South Downs Dark Skies Festival', to take place from 10<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> February 2017 to celebrate the new South Downs International Dark Skies Reserve designation.

The National Park Authority and partners will be running star-gazing events across the school half-term period: a chance for experts to show-off our skies, share tips on how to enjoy them and explain why they are worth protecting.

A 'South Downs Star Gazing Day' will take place in Midhurst on Saturday 18 February with a whole day of family stargazing activities. Starting at the South Downs Planetarium in Chichester and culminating in a star party in Midhurst where people can learn about nocturnal wildlife, astrophotography and join a 'make friends with your telescope' event to learn how to get the best out of your own telescope. More details will be available via:

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/darkskiesfestival>

### **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.

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](mailto:natalie.fellows@southdowns.gov.uk)
- The Authority's Western Downs team, based at the Queen Elizabeth Country Park, 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](mailto:nigel.james@southdowns.gov.uk)) or the Lead Ranger Elaina Whittaker-Slark ([Elaina.Slark@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto: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](mailto:doug.jones@southdowns.gov.uk)

November 2016



## Heathlands Reunited – Expression of interest as a volunteer

What is the 'Heathlands Reunited' project?

Heathland covers just 1% of the South Downs National Park, mostly separated into 'islands' where isolated plants and animals are far more likely to be vulnerable to local extinction. The Heathlands Reunited project, led by the National Park Authority and supported by 10 partners aims to create new and improve existing heathland to cover an area greater than 1,200 football pitches.

Whilst the project focuses on restoring, expanding and reconnecting threatened heathland habitats its purpose is also to enthuse and inspire people to visit them, learn more about them and use them responsibly and sustainably. The project will run across 41 sites over 5 years.

There will be a variety of voluntary opportunities, some of which will include training, that come alongside this project. If you are interested in getting involved we would like to hear from you. Please fill in the below form.

I .....(name) would like to express interest in volunteering for this project. I am happy to be sent more information about this via the contact details given below.

**If applicable, please note any organisation you currently volunteer for:**

.....

**Address:**

**Telephone number:**

**Email:**

**Preferred area of interest, please circle:**    Photography    Historical/Heritage

Dog Walker Engagement    Events    Wildlife/Habitat Monitoring

**Please give us some information regarding your skills/experience:**

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South Downs Centre, North  
Street,  
Midhurst, West Sussex, GU29

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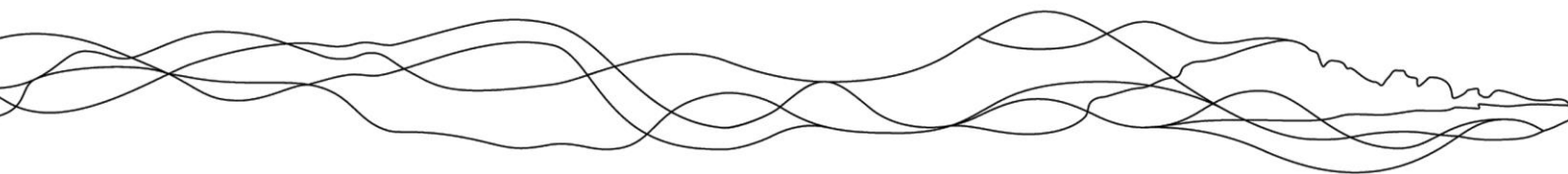
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E: info@southdowns.gov.uk

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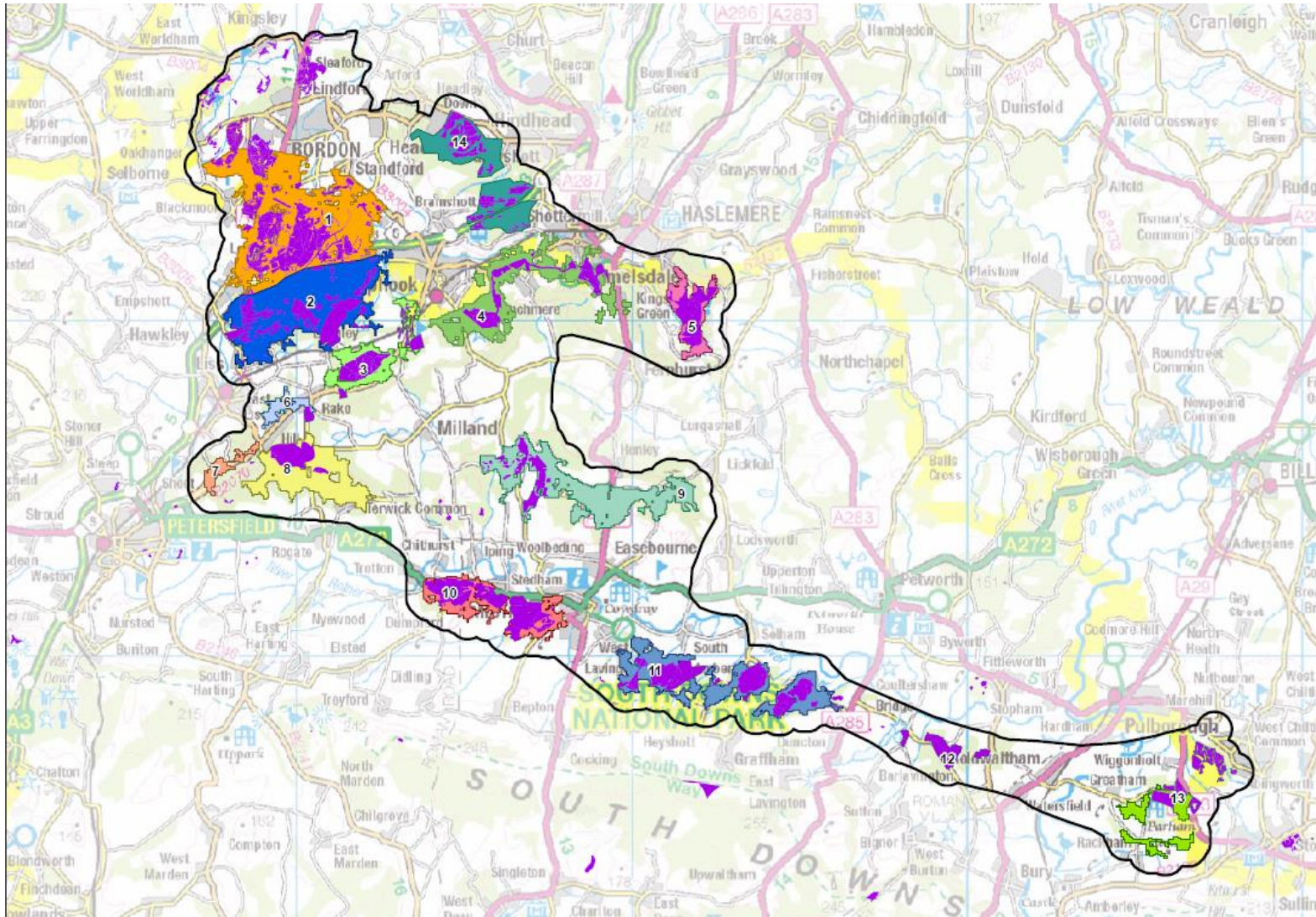
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## Project Area



Please return this form to **[liz.bounton@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:liz.bounton@southdowns.gov.uk)** or post to:  
Heathlands Reunited, South Downs Centre, North Street, Midhurst, West Sussex, GU29 9DH