

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 27th November 2013

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.

Policies and plans

As the National Park Authority is still less than three years old, there is still much work to be done in developing policies and plans for the long term future of the area. As a result of earlier work to identify the range of 'special qualities' that people hold dear and work to produce a baseline 'State of the Park' report, it has now been possible to finalise the first ever **Management Plan** for the National Park. This will take account of comments made by Parish Councils and a wide range of other partners in a series of consultation stages.

Like the 'State of the Park' report, the Management Plan is something which Central Government requires every National Park Authority to produce. The final content of the Management Plan is due to be considered at a meeting of the full National Park Authority on 3rd December so that it can be printed and circulated early in 2014. 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...

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 – something else which is statutorily required by Government.

Once again, there will be opportunities for Parish Councils to make inputs at a number of different stages. The NPA is aiming to consult on an 'Options Paper' in early 2014. This will include various potential options on strategic planning issues for the National Park such as landscape, cultural heritage, design, housing, gypsy and travellers, sustainable transport, and economy & tourism. The NPA will be looking to engage with Parish Councils during the consultation period.

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 the '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 the 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.

Newsletters will be produced for Parish Councils (and others) at important stages of this process. The first 'Local Plan Newsletter' was circulated to Parish Clerks on 1st October.

Following the resumption of the Inspector's examination into the East Hampshire Joint Core Strategy, his report is promised by 31st January with important details available by 13th December.

Other planning issues

- Nat Belderson is continuing to act as the National Park's '**Link Officer**' for any planning application matters in East Hampshire whilst Natalie Fellows is on maternity leave. Nat

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 EHDC as part of the Park's delegated arrangements. Nat can be contacted via nat.belderson@southdowns.gov.uk or 07917 602373

- The Park Authority has agreed procedures to **endorse and adopt community-led plans** produced by Parish Councils and others across the Park. It is recognised that time-consuming and expensive Neighbourhood Plans are not necessarily appropriate for many communities and so measures have been put in place to ensure that suitable plans (eg. Village Design Statements) can be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents and work undertaken in other exercises (such as Parish Plans) can be formally endorsed. This should help ensure that locally produced policies are taken into account in the consideration of planning applications and in applications for grant funding. For more details contact Chris Paterson via chris.paterson@southdowns.gov.uk or 01730 811766
- The NPA is commissioning a customer **satisfaction survey** into its development management service (how planning applications are handled) over the next few months as part of its aim to constantly look for improvements. It is intended to include a sample of about forty Parish Councils from across the Park in the telephone survey which will be undertaken by a company called BMG Research. If parishes from East Hampshire would like to take part in this survey, please contact Mike Bleakley, Planning Services Manager, on 0300 303 1053 or via mike.bleakley@southdowns.gov.uk. The survey will also engage a sample of applicants, agents and customers who have made third party representations and also a number of statutory and non-statutory consultees who use the NPA's systems. The telephone survey should take around 10-15 minutes. It would be helpful to focus on those parishes which have the greatest caseloads but others can also be considered.

Grants available and other news

- More and more communities are taking advantage of grants available from the NPA's '**Sustainable Communities Fund**'. 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: work to bring a community's Saxon past to life, repairs to cherished ancient monuments and the excavation and restoration of ancient burial mounds on Petersfield Heath. The Sustainable Communities Fund (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
- I have mentioned the NPA's new '**Local Sustainable Transport Fund**' in my previous notes. This offers small grants to Parish Councils, businesses, voluntary groups and not for profit organisations to encourage sustainable travel to and in the National Park. These grants offer opportunities for village pubs and other rural businesses. Visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/transportfund or by call 01730 811755. As part of this wider initiative, a number of community rail initiatives are being explored with EHDC and SouthWest Trains to improve facilities, information and local walks / rides. A number of parishes in East Hampshire are now actively involved in this initiative
- The South Downs National Park may have some **dark skies** of international quality. Although parts of the area sits in the middle of the most populous part of the country where the orange glow of light pollution may hide the rich landscape of stars above,

there are still many places where the night skies are dark enough to reveal an astonishing and glorious starscape. One of our Local Rangers, Dan Oakley, is leading work for the whole of the National Park on this topic and he's hoping that lots of people will help to measure the quality and area of the National Park's dark skies by trying some autumnal astronomy. Full guidance is provided on the National Park's website at: <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/about-us/news/press-notices/south-downs-hunt-for-andromeda>. This is an activity which some Parish Councils may wish to encourage their communities to support...

- The National Park Authority will be submitting comments into the Government's recent consultation about the **Common Agricultural Policy** (CAP). The consultation was launched on 1st November with responses required by 28th – quite a short timescale for something which covers the allocation of some £20 billion of EU subsidies over the next seven years. Details can be found on Defra's website at <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/communications/cap-consultation>
- 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 management of chalk grassland (including re sowing wild flower seeds), work with many local farmers to install barn owl boxes and improvements to South Downs Way viewpoints. 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 571381

From January the NPA will be setting up a new **'Policy & Programme' Committee** (alongside the Planning Committee) to consider all its other important policy decisions (including the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), highways and transport issues, major projects and grant funding, energy, climate change and water policies etc). At this stage it does not look as though either of the Parish Council representatives from Hampshire will be allocated to this Committee – both are due to sit on the Planning Committee.

Finally, a date for the next regular liaison meeting with Hampshire Parish Councils is being explored for March 2014 – to enable parishes to play a full part in the 'options' stage of the Park-wide Local Plan.

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 22nd November 2013*