

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 16th September 2015

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 now be shorter than in the past. 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 briefing notes I will focus primarily on the consultation on the latest version of the National Park's draft Local Plan (the 'Preferred Options' version) as this was launched at the beginning of this month with comments required by 28th October. I will, however, also mention a number of other issues under the following headings:

- Education and Learning
- Achievements 'on the ground'
- "Take the Lead" to help promote responsible dog walking
- The National Park's annual 'newspaper' (South Downs View) and events listings
- Sustainable Travel
- Local contacts.

South Downs Local Plan: Preferred Options

Have your say during the consultation period: 2 September – 28 October.

The National Park Authority has recently published a very important document and the views of Parish Councils will be very helpful in finalising a wide range of policies that will affect the area for the next 15-20 years.

Details of the 'Preferred Options' version of the emerging Local Plan were summarised at the recent, well-attended meeting for Parish Councils which was held in Meonstoke on 9th September. Details of how to take part in the consultation were also explained.

All Parish Councils have already been sent details but this link should also take you to the appropriate part of the NPA website:

<https://consult.southdowns.gov.uk/consult.ti/localplanpo/consultationHome>

Parish Councils are well placed to help ensure that this Local Plan is as good as it can possibly be.

Please take the time to study the documentation over the next few weeks – and please let the NPA know what you like, as well as what you don't like. Someone else may oppose the policies that you like: so it can be important for the NPA to know when you think they have got things right!

The Plan contains a full set of planning policies with specific topics ranging from landscape, conservation, tourism and recreation through to land to be allocated for development: employment, housing etc.

This is the first time that a single Local Plan has been produced as one entity for this area – and the Local Plan will supersede all existing Local Plans and Joint Core Strategies which currently cover the area.

After this current consultation phase, amendments will be made to the Plan and, in due course, it will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for independent examination.

The NPA hopes that this process will be completed in 2017 and the Plan will then form the main part of the 'Development Plan' [alongside any adopted Neighbourhood Plans (being developed by some communities in the National Park) and alongside Minerals & Waste Plans] for the period up to 2032.

This is what every planning application in the National Park will be considered against.

Some things to look out for

- As well as considering all the policies in the Plan, please try to think about **anything that might be missing!** What policies might help you try to ensure the best future for the National Park?
- Bear in mind that all the policies that we have been used to using over the last 10-20 years are being replaced – with the intention being to introduce new ones, better tailored to the National Park. Parish Councils may wish to **reflect on questions like:** what Policies have we liked over the last 10-20 years? Have some Policies been too weak? Or too strong? What extra things do we wish those Policies might have covered? After reflecting on those sorts of questions, a study of the new policies may reveal some issues for comment ...
- For parishes which are not producing Neighbourhood Plans, this Local Plan is the only way of obtaining designation for **Local Green Spaces**. This is a relatively new way of providing special protection against development for green areas which are felt to be of particular importance to local communities. Parish Councils will need to submit details during the consultation period described above (2 September – 28 October) and the following sources of guidance may be helpful: <http://www.oss.org.uk/what-we-do/local-green-space-designation/> and <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space/local-green-space-designation/>
- There are also some proposed revisions to **Settlement Policy Boundaries** (illustrated by a series of maps) and **allocations of new housing** to a number of settlements across the National Park (with maps illustrating proposed locations).

Draft Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule

- The draft Charging Schedule has also been published alongside the Local Plan Preferred Options documentation. This forms the second of two consultation stages that need to be undertaken before the CIL Charging Schedule can be adopted. Parish Councils have already had an opportunity to comment on a Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule in February / March 2014
- A copy of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) is also being published alongside the Draft Charging Schedule and projects from Parish Councils can always be considered. Contact gareth.giles@southdowns.gov.uk for more information

Section 106 Funds

Within the National Park area it is anticipated that the CIL regime will come into effect from 1st April 2016. Until that date S.106 funds can still be collected by the planning authority for environmental, community or transport projects. However, Parish Councils now need to have specific projects in mind (and contributions currently being collected should only be

used to deliver those specific projects) as part of the Government's plan to stop Parish Councils building up pots of resources for unspecified purposes.

Parish Councils may, therefore, find it helpful to update their spending priorities on a regular basis and to inform Gareth Giles at the National park Authority, preferably with a copy to Alisdair Tweddle at EHDC, too.

Some Parish Councils may currently have sums of funding, collected from previous developments, held by EHDC and SDNPA. To find out the sums involved, the contact details are Alisdair Tweddle (EHDC): Alisdair.Tweddle@easthants.gov.uk and 01730 234282 or Claire Mattingley (SDNPA): Claire.Mattingley@southdowns.gov.uk and 01730 819259.

Education and Learning

There will soon be yet more enhancements to the NPA's comprehensive 'Learning Zone' which helps teachers, students and people of all ages "bring learning to life" in the local environment: <http://learning.southdowns.gov.uk/>

New tools to help teachers and students to learn about the local area will include:

- A new blog with easier to add articles – much quicker for publishing all the great stories about getting out and about in the National Park.
- An online calendar for educational events – everything from Teachers CPD to children's activity sessions.
- A new and much improved resource finder to take learners straight to the information they need.

In recent weeks the Hampshire Area team and Education colleagues have introduced a wide range of students (from Primary School level to students from Groningen University in The Netherlands) to the South Downs and the role of the NPA at Butser Hill and the nearby Sustainability Centre.

On The Ground

- Rangers and volunteers have set up more water vole release pens and there are now over 320 more water voles in the River Meon, with proof that they are definitely breeding
- There is also good news about otters, too, with at least one mother and cub now seen to have travelled as far as East Meon in recent weeks
- Working with Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Trust, a mink monitoring and dispatch training day was run for people in the River Rother catchment area.
- Rangers have carried out surveys to help understand the extent and condition of chalk grassland in the National Park.
- Volunteers have also tackled a range of invasive species by clearing Himalayan balsam, ragwort, bracken, nettles, thistle, birch, sycamore and brambles
- Giant hog weed has also been tackled along a 300 meter stretch of the River Rother in Sheet, Hampshire
- Volunteers have also devoted significant amounts of time to 'access improvement' work: replacing and installing gates, stiles, signposts, steps and fencing.

"Take the Lead" and help promote responsible dog walking

New videos promoting responsible dog walking in the South Downs have been produced and are available for communities to show in their village halls as part of parish film shows or other events.

Taking responsibility for dogs is especially important near to vulnerable livestock and wherever ground-nesting birds (such as nightjars) might be living.

Details of the 'Take the Lead' campaign are available here:

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/explore/walking/take-the-lead/>

And this link should enable you to download the amusing animated film with a serious message (or two):

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/lh9kmmivhrg2zwe/SDNP%20Take%20the%20Lead.mov?dl=0>

Parish Councils may wish to encourage showings of this video at community events – particularly in the spring when pregnant ewes and young lambs abound...

The National Park's annual 'newspaper' (South Downs View) and events listings

At the last EHAPTC meeting I was asked a couple of questions about 'South Downs View' which may now be helpful to all parishes for future years:

- To obtain copies for local outlets etc contact Laura Warren (based in the South Downs Centre in Midhurst): 01730 819253 and laura.warren@southdowns.gov.uk
- To get any local events into the listings for future years, contact Becka Saunders (also at SDC in Midhurst): 01730 819256 and rebecca.saunders@southdowns.gov.uk

There is also an on-line listing of events throughout the National Park and details of how to submit local events can be found here:

<http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/events/submit-event/>

Sustainable Travel

The National park Authority has been promoting a number of Sustainable Travel initiatives over the summer months:

- Two new summer weekend bus services were launched in Hampshire (the Weekender and the South Downs Rambler), funded through the DfT Local Sustainable Transport Fund. Details are available here: <http://www.southdownsbybus.co.uk/>
- And "2-for-1" offers across a number of attractions throughout the South Downs were launched for those visitors who arrive by bus or train. Further details are available here: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/discover-more-south-downs-for-less/>

Finally, just a reminder about a **short term fund for grants** to Parish Councils, Community Groups and businesses to promote car-free travel initiatives. In the period to March 2015 the National Park Authority awarded 20 Sustainable Travel Grants and allocated over £90,000 to projects which included the Lewes Hike & Bike Festival, shuttle bus services for the Charleston Small Wonders Festival and new walks and cycle leaflets. This funding is supported by the Department for Transport's Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) programme and it has now been extended to 2015/16. The National Park Authority is, therefore, able to offer more grants (anything between £250 and £5,000) for projects that promote car-free travel in the National Park. Community groups, local organisations and businesses can apply to the Sustainable Travel Fund (STF) to encourage travel by rail, bus, bike or on foot. *As mentioned in an earlier message, the final deadline for applications is 30th September and all projects must be completed by the end of January 2016.* For more information and full details on how to apply please see www.southdowns.gov.uk/stf. A contact officer for this opportunity is Kathy Azopardi, Sustainable Transport Officer: Kathy.Azopardi@southdowns.gov.uk and 01730 819246

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, 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 Nick Heasman, our Area Manager, on nick.heasman@southdowns.gov.uk or 02392 571381

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 10th September 2015