

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 19th September 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 these notes are shorter than they were initially. Anyone 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 these other sources I will provide information about the following:

- Update on the South Downs Local Plan
- Planning Appeal Performance
- New 'Village Design Statement' Toolkit
- Partnership Management Plan
- Grant scheme to increase affordable housing stock
- More businesses welcome cyclists and walkers
- Protecting our water supplies
- Achievements of National Park Rangers and Volunteers
- Funding for local projects
- Local contacts.

Update on the South Downs Local Plan

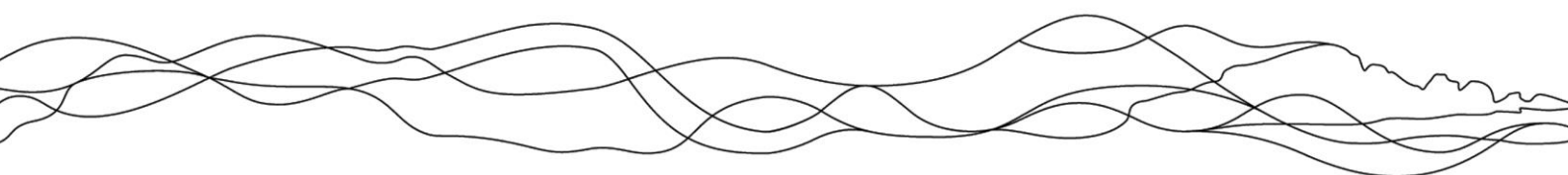
As reported in my last note (June 2018) the Plan is now in the 'examination' stage of its process with information and updates being published on the SDNPA's website on the [Examination page](#)

The Inspector's first draft programme of hearings is as follows:

- Tuesday 13th November to Thursday 15th November at Midhurst (General Introduction plus the following Strategic Matters: Vision & Objectives; Strategy; Core Policies; Overall Housing Need and Supply, including Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation plus Employment Land and Presentation)
- Tuesday 4th December to Thursday 6th December at Midhurst (Non-Strategic and Development Matters, including Landscape, Design, Biodiversity & Affordable Homes plus Issues Relating to Specific Settlements, including SPBs and LGSS)
- Tuesday 11th December to Thursday 13th December at Lewes (Issues Relating to Individual Sites, SD56-57 and SD58-SD96).

My understanding is that there is unlikely to be any opportunity for Parish Councils who support policies in the Local Plan to be able to appear at the Hearings to make these views known. Parish Councils may, however, wish to contact SDNPA officers to see if there is any further help or assistance that they can provide to SDNPA in instances where objectors will be appearing at the Hearings to promote changes to the Plan.

As well as the Local Plan itself the NPA's submissions to Government included all the evidence used in the preparation of the Plan and more than 2,500 comments received in the final pre-submission consultation held in autumn 2017. All this information is available to view at www.southdowns.gov.uk/localplan.



Planning Appeals

It has been another successful quarter for the Authority in terms of appeal decisions. Over the period June – August there were 21 appeal decisions, 76% of which were dismissed. By way of comparison, 70% of appeals were dismissed in FY 2017/18 which was the Authority's strongest ever performance. A large degree of credit is due to Councillors and staff at EHDC who have handled all those in the District.

New 'Village Design Statement' Toolkit

The Authority is developing some new advice, to be part of the Community Planning Toolkit, on a landscape-led approach to Village Design Statements. This new advice will be developed alongside two parishes who are setting out on the production of a VDS: Easesbourne and Jevington.

Partnership Management Plan

National Park Authorities are required to produce Partnership Management Plans (PMP) to influence the nature of future change in ways which will leave the National Park in a better state for future generations to avoid. PMPs are drawn up in close partnership with a wide range of stakeholders, encompassing widespread engagement and debate

The existing South Downs PMP covers the period 2014-2019 and it is, therefore, due to be reviewed. The process will be focused onto a number of important outcomes and potential programmes to work towards those outcomes.

As usual, the National Park Authority will want to engage Parish Councils closely in this work. It is, therefore, anticipated that the next round of Parish workshops will focus on this topic. The workshops will be held in November and the dates and other details will be circulated to Clerks very shortly.

Grant scheme to increase affordable housing stock

The National Park Authority has launched a new grant scheme, using money paid by developers, to deliver more affordable housing in the South Downs. Grants of between £10,000 and £30,000 are available for affordable dwellings constructed on rural exceptions sites (sites that would not be granted planning permission for open market housing) or for affordable housing delivered through community-led initiatives such as Community Land Trusts. The scheme involves a number of steps that would need to be taken. If your community would like to know more about the grant scheme, please contact affordablehousing@southdowns.gov.uk

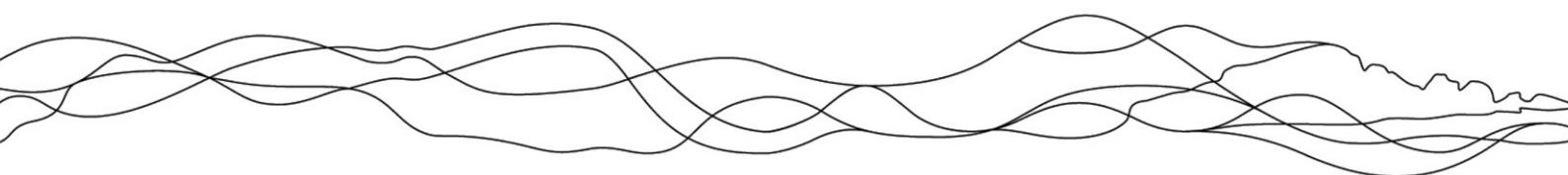
More businesses welcome cyclists and walkers

Over 85 businesses are actively welcoming cyclists and walkers to the National Park now that the South Downs' Cyclists and Walkers Welcome scheme has been extended into West Sussex following successful pilots in Petersfield and Lewes, launched in 2017.

The estimated spend of walkers in the English countryside is £6.14 billion /year, which generates over £2 billion in income and supports around 245,000 full time jobs. Cycle tourism is estimated to be worth £2.4 billion to the UK economy from 1.23 million overnight trips and 149 million day trips. Cyclists and their families spend in local shops and stay in accommodation, but they also return for future visits.

All types of business are welcome to join the scheme, provided that they: commit to one of three levels of welcome requirements; maintain accurate up-to-date information and services and promote their cyclist and walker friendly services on their own website and promotional materials.

More details of the scheme are available here: www.southdowns.gov.uk/cyclists-walkers-welcome-scheme-for-businesses/



Protecting water supplies

Research in the Brighton area of the National Park is showing that farmers who plant different crops can help reduce nitrogen pollution in water.

The South Downs' rivers and aquifers are an integral part of the landscapes, relied on by 1.2 million people as well as wildlife. But, like many aquifers and rivers across the world, they are polluted with nitrates from fertilisers and other sources as well as pollution from road run-off.

The National Park Authority has teamed up with the Environment Agency, Natural England, Southern Water, Brighton & Hove City Council and the University of Brighton. Research has been exploring whether using cover crops can reduce nitrates from fertilisers getting into ground water.

Results appear to be encouraging with all types of cover crop significantly reducing nitrates leaching into groundwater compared to leaving land fallow over winter. The amount of reduction varied from 40% to 70% depending on the crop and on its location.

There is more work to be done in this area as it looks like the best results will come from individual farms using tailored 'recipes' for their cover crops. The project will also include how to support and encourage more farmers to apply these results on their own land.

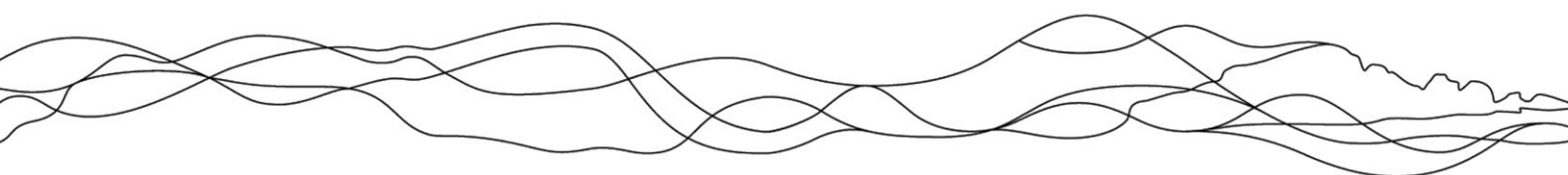
Other issues might come to light in the longer term but concerns that the introduction of cover crops might increase pests, resulting in the need for more pesticides, appear to be unfounded. There were no more snails and slugs on the cover crops than in the control fallow areas.

More details are available here: www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/water/brighton-champ-for-water/

Achievements of National Park Rangers and Volunteers

From meeting with farmers, offering training and support to local communities, leading walks, organising and training volunteers, controlling invasive species and supporting key species, South Downs National Park Rangers are out in the National Park every weekday and many weekends over the year. Don't forget to say hello if you spot them out working. Here's a taste of what they have achieved over the last couple of months:

- Tackled Himalayan Balsam and other invasive non-native species in a number of locations
- Assisted a local archaeological dig by clearing invasive nettles prior to the next stage of investigations
- Managed vegetation at other important historic sites in the area
- Carried out the final water vole release involving the local community and school groups
- Commenced a protected species survey on Petersfield Heath to contribute to an in-depth management plan of the site
- Brushcut regrowth at two chalk grassland sites so as to improve floristic diversity
- Completed butterfly surveys at a number of sites
- Held a 'Cache In, Trash Out' event as part of International Geo-caching day with all attendees collecting litter and tackling invasive non-native species
- Managed invasive nettles along the River Meon: part of an annual cut programme which has taken place for four years and which has drastically improved plant diversity
- Improved access and signage along the South Downs Way
- Worked with Hampshire County Council to improve access along other parts of the rights of way network in the national park.



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/>

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, recently moved to Droxford, 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).

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

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13th September 2018

