

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Parish & Town Councils June 2020

In the absence of the normal quarterly meeting of EHAPTC during the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic, I thought that I could circulate some information 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 anyone can sign up 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:

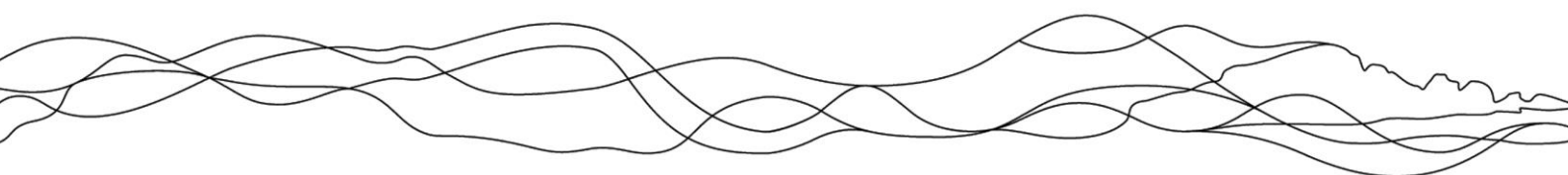
- The Partnership Management Plan
- Planning Services
- Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic
- Some other new initiatives
- Funding for local projects
- Local contacts.

The Partnership Management Plan

Amongst many events to be cancelled because of the Covid-19 pandemic was the official launch of the new South Downs Partnership Management Plan and follow-up workshops with Parish Councils. However, the May edition of 'South Downs News' provides information about the Partnership Management Plan and can be accessed by [clicking here](#) whilst full details of the Plan are available on-line here: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/partnership-management-plan/>. In addition, Chris Paterson is happy to talk with Parish Councils about opportunities to contribute to the plan and he can be contacted via chris.paterson@southdowns.gov.uk

Planning services

The National Park Authority (and host authorities such as East Hampshire District Council) have continued to carry out development management and planning policy services despite facing a number of challenging restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic. The majority of officers have been working from home with some limited office cover. In accordance with the Government's social distancing restrictions and regulations prohibiting public meetings, a number of swift adjustments were made to parts of the planning system to continue with business whilst upholding democratic principles and compliance with the public health guidance. Some adjustments were made to delegation agreements for officers and the Park Authority managed to continue with most of the normal publicity arrangements for planning applications. Parish councils and interested parties should therefore continue to submit any comments on applications as normal and these will always be given due consideration. Due to difficulties with undertaking site visits and other challenges it is however inevitable that there may be some delays in reaching decisions but from the beginning of June it has been possible to hold 'normal' Committee Meetings (by video-conferencing platforms) with members of the public able to take part. The NPA's Link Officer for East Hampshire is now Jean Chambers (Jean.Chambers@southdowns.gov.uk and 01730 819371) who may be able to help with specific queries. The Spring edition of the NPA's Planning Newsletter provided information on a range of topics prior to the pandemic and can be viewed via this link: https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/South-Downs-Planning-Newsletter-April-2020_FINAL.pdf



Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Like many other organisations, the National Park Authority adapted swiftly to remote working and maintained an impressive level of activity – with a range of extra support initiatives being developed. The Park's social media and **new website** ([click here](#)) have seen unprecedented levels of public engagement which may prove to be very beneficial in the future. It is recognised, however, that this is not a practical way of delivering all objectives and there will be a need to return to working in the landscape (and to formal meetings and face to face contact) as soon as it is safe and practicable to do so. Offices are currently reopening for staff, operating in a safe and socially distanced manner.

From the outset of the pandemic the National Park Authority ensured that its website and social media always reflected the latest **advice in a fast changing situation**. People have been urged to protect themselves, their families and local communities by avoiding busy hotspots, exploring quieter places, coming by bike or walking, only parking in car parks and observing the three Rs of restraint, responsibility and respect. It was explained that as well as being a wonderful breathing space, perhaps now needed by people more than ever before, the National Park is looked after by scores of dedicated farmers who have been keeping food supplies going during the pandemic and it was, therefore, always important for people to stick to public rights of way, take litter home and keep dogs on leads. The full advice can be found at <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/coronavirus-covid-19-update/> with other important guidance for people here: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/top-tips-responsible-visitor-national-park/>

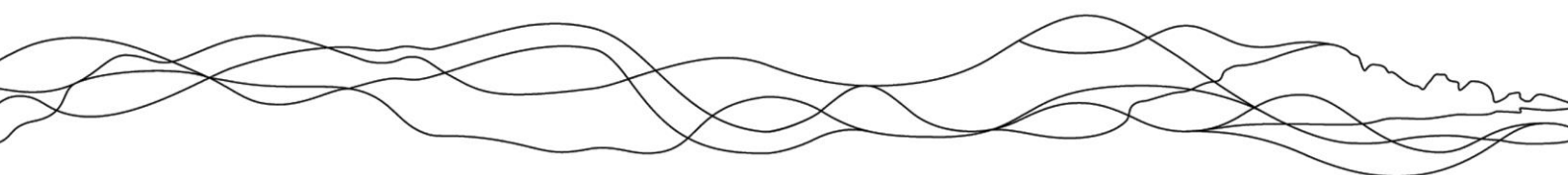
The NPA had established five Themed Programme Boards which, during the lockdown period, developed and supported a range of innovative projects in response to the impact of the virus on the landscape and rural economy. The meeting of the National Park Authority which was held in May (by Zoom) approved a **new Recovery Fund** for each of these programme areas for the specific purpose of responding to the impact of the virus for initiatives that are in line with the objectives of the new Partnership Management Plan and in accordance with the Park's statutory purposes. Contacts with farmers, rural businesses and cultural organisations indicated the urgent need for such assistance and that the NPA's swift attention was greatly appreciated – even though the limited amounts of funding can, inevitably, only scratch the surface of the wide range of huge needs. The five themed areas are: Access; Cultural Heritage; Landscape & Biodiversity; Sustainable Economy & Tourism; and Connecting People & Communities. Initial details of this new 'Recovery Fund' are available [here](#) with a dedicated email address: recovery@southdowns.gov.uk

At a very early stage of the pandemic the National Park Authority produced an **Interactive Map** ([click here](#)) to help local communities: it provides information on local food and drink suppliers as a way of assisting local businesses and helping people find sources of supplies without having to travel far from their homes. And it also notes other help available, particularly for the vulnerable and elderly.

Amongst other early initiatives were a series of webinars, hosted with a number of partner organisations, for **visitor economy businesses**, utilising experts on topics relevant to issues generated by Covid-19. Three events addressing key aspects of Survive, Revive and Thrive were held early in May and June and they can be viewed (or read the minutes) [here](#).

The NPA has also provided advice and support for a wide range of **heritage** partners (including museums, galleries and heritage sites) to help with practical issues such as insurance, conservation and site security during the enforced period of closure – including meetings of a new East Hants Museum Network – followed by helping to scope requirements for re-opening, adaptation etc.

Practical support for partners in the **environment sector** (such as wildlife trusts) has included advice in connection with site visits, surveys and summer clearance works at places such as Ebernoe Common.



There has also been **work with Public Health and social prescribing partners** to develop opportunities for people to access the National Park as lockdown restrictions are gradually lifted so as to address physical and mental health issues.

And there is a meeting of the South Downs **Education Network** on 25th June (10am – 12noon): a network for businesses and organisations who support schools to access learning outside the classroom in the South Down. This will be a virtual meeting and will offer opportunities for participants to share experiences of the Covid-19 situation and identify potential actions to achieve the aims of providing high-quality outdoor learning experiences for schools and groups. Places can be booked via this link: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/our-south-downs-education-network-meeting-virtual-tickets-108671581626>

On a **wider scale**, NPA officers are already working with colleagues from other protected landscapes and with government officials exploring the role that such places might be able to play in any National Recovery Programme, including the concept of a Green Recovery. And similar talks are taking place at local levels to discuss risks of traditional approaches to economic recovery and opportunities to embed zero carbon and nature-based solutions within economic recovery decision making.

Some other new initiatives

New scheme to connect families with nature

The NPA has launched a new initiative to help connect families with the joys of nature through fun learning activities. Inspired by the “founding father” of the National Park movement, John Muir, the new scheme that will help families explore a range of nature-based activities and work their way towards a Family John Muir Award. The activities programme is fully adaptable for each family’s circumstances and Parish Councils are encouraged to share the details so that families can sign up: www.southdowns.gov.uk/learning/john-muir-award/achieve-the-family-john-muir-award/

Celebrating magical woodlands

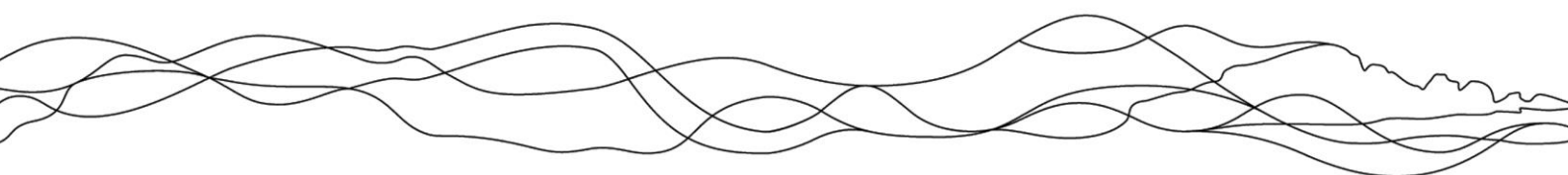
To help people appreciate and understand the wonderful woodlands of the South Downs, even during the lockdown period, the National Park Authority released a series of new films that highlight the trees, animals and people who make these places so beautiful and enchanting. People often think of the South Downs as an area of rolling chalk grassland hills but, in the western parts of the National Park, pasture gives way to some of the richest and most diverse woodland in the country. Trees cover almost a quarter of this National Park – more woodland than in any other National Park in England or Wales – and no two woodlands are the same, each being home to a unique set of trees and animals. As well as the woods, the new films are also about the people who are the stewards of these amazing places and they can be accessed via these three links: <https://youtu.be/uVqggsxxAEk>; https://youtu.be/Sz_S4RETNm8; and https://youtu.be/ymgljGLz_pk.

Trees for the downs

The campaign to plant 5,000 trees across the National Park has almost reached its fundraising target and initial expressions of interest for planting are being taken via an online application process. The aim is to identify suitable projects that will provide benefits to people, wildlife and the landscape of the South Downs. It is hoped that planting will be carried out over the winter and more details are available here: <https://www.southdownstrust.org.uk/trees-fund/>

National Park photography competition now open

This year’s annual completion has a first prize of £250 on offer to the amateur or professional photographer who best captures the theme of ‘My tranquil haven’. And to mark the 10th anniversary of the National Park, the competition is also being extended this year to include a youth category for budding young photographers. The closing date for entries is 23rd October and details are available here: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/win-250-in-the-south-downs-national-park-photo-competition/>



Wild Chalk Festival: a six-day virtual event in July

Plans are being made to deliver this year's Wild Chalk festival as a six day 'virtual' event starting on Sunday 19th July. Now in its third year, Wild Chalk celebrates the wildlife, history and water filtering properties of the chalk downland and the event attracted 1,700 people last year. Chalk grassland is one of the most unique and beautiful wildlife habitats on the planet, with blankets of colourful wildflowers and incredible butterfly diversity. The virtual festival will include videos and quizzes for people of all ages to have fun and learn more about this special habitat. Full details will be announced in the next edition of South Downs News and will also be promoted via the National Park's social media channels and on www.southdowns.gov.uk. The opportunity will be taken to spread important messages about the Countryside Code and to learn lessons for a similar event about Heathlands later in the year.

South Downs View published

South Downs View is the twice-yearly magazine from the South Downs National Park Authority with lots of news, wildlife stories, thanks to farmers and locations for adventures in the area. The latest edition also describes successes from the first 10 years of the National Park and summarises the Partnership Management Plan 2020-2025. This edition can be read or downloaded via this link: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/publications/south-downs-view/>

Funding for local projects

In addition to the Authority's new Recovery Fund (referred to above with details available [here](#)), 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 applying for a Sustainable Communities Grant or CIL funding. I continue to Chair 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 is available via [this link \(https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-communities/grants-and-funding/sustainable-communities-fund/\)](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-communities/grants-and-funding/sustainable-communities-fund/)

Local contacts

The Planning Link Officer role for East Hampshire is now handled by Jean Chambers and her contact details are Jean.Chambers@southdowns.gov.uk and 01730 819371.

The Authority's Western Downs team acts as a 'first stop shop' for communities and land managers, providing advice and support towards achieving National Park 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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