

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Parish & Town Councils January 2021

In the absence of the normal quarterly meetings 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/>. Parishes should also be receiving copies of the NPA's Planning Newsletter (the most recent edition is available [here](#)) and others can subscribe via this link: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-newsletter/>

To complement these other sources I will provide information about the following:

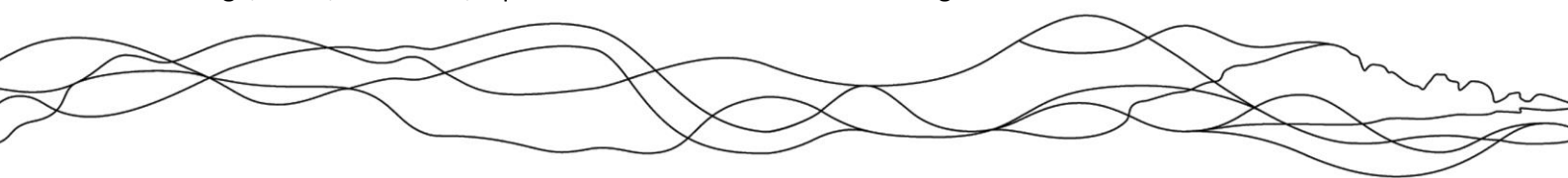
- Parish Workshop Meetings
- Some Planning News
- On-line Events and Activities
- Dark Skies Festival (February 2021)
- Scheduled Monuments
- House of Commons adjournment debate
- Covid Recovery Grants
- Funding for local projects
- Local contacts.

Parish Workshop Meetings

The 'virtual' workshops held towards the end of last year appear to have been well received and attracted some new faces. The subsequent survey was designed to help with plans for 2021. Due to the continuing need to hold meetings in a 'virtual' way it is hoped that the next event will be held in the spring and that it may take the form of a webinar providing opportunities for communities to share experiences and learning across the National Park. Thereafter it is anticipated that there will be another traditional session (similar format to the December 2020 event) and possibly another webinar later in the year. All the presentations (and recordings of issues raised etc) from the December meetings are still available on the SDNPA website for anyone to view or listen again to the Q&A session: click [here](#). The events focused on the recently updated Partnership Management Plan with information on: how Town and Parish Councils can contribute to delivering outcomes; examples of projects the SDNPA and its partners have been working on recently; summaries of contributions made by Town and Parish Councils; and examples of other local actions which have contributed to the delivery of the Partnership Management Plan. One of the main topics raised in the discussion period was the adverse effects of BOATs (Byways Open to All Traffic) in the East Hampshire part of the National Park.

Some planning news

Following the adoption of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) relating to Affordable Housing and Sustainable Construction, the SDNPA planning team continues to produce extra planning policy guidance in a programme to supplement the Local Plan. Topics currently in the pipeline include Parking Standards, Dark Night Skies and Camping / Glamping as well as a Habitats Regulations Assessment Technical Advice Note (TAN). There were 40-50 responses to the initial consultation on the Parking SPD including points about on-street parking, cycle parking and electric vehicle charging points. It is hoped that this SPD will be adopted in April after another period of consultation. Consultation on the Camping & Glamping TAN is due to run from 2 February to 16 March and other Supplementary Planning Documents and Technical Advice Notes which are due to be produced in the future include guidance on Design, Trees, Viticulture, Equestrian uses and Health & Wellbeing.



The NPA has also published its annual monitoring report which considers the performance of policies across the National Park and trends against various indicators with brief commentaries on key findings. The report can be found via [this webpage](#). The SDNPA's response to the Government's White Paper 'Planning for the Future' is [here](#) but, at around the same time in 2020, the Government also made a number of changes to the Use Classes Order and to Permitted Development Rights which mean that a number of changes no longer need planning permission. It was easy to miss these changes whilst attention was focused on the White Paper and a useful guide can be found [here](#).

On-line events and activities

Covid-19 brought an immediate halt to the NPA's programme of face-to-face events which help to engage key audiences. In their place, a number of on-line events and activities were swiftly devised including a 'Wild Chalk Festival' and a 'Secrets of the Heath' event. The Wild Chalk Festival saw a one-day event replaced with six days of activities which raised awareness of (and connected people with) chalk grassland landscapes. As well as short films there was a series of 'Facebook live' events with experts talking to the public in real time and answering scores of wide-ranging questions. Whilst the 2019 Wild Chalk event had attracted 1,700 people, the 2020 virtual Festival reached just over 83,000 people with many from outside the National Park being able to learn about its attributes and its work. A similar re-design of the annual 'Secrets of the Heath' event also took place which began with the launch of a new sculpture trail (via seven short video films). The rest of the weekend's activities included a programme of live and pre-recorded events and Pinterest boards which all appear to have been very well received. The weekend normally attracts around 2,000 people but, on this occasion, engaged with about 83,500. Experience from these events will no doubt help to shape plans for 2021 and beyond.

Details of the sculpture trail in the heathland areas of East Hampshire / West Sussex area can be found [here](#) with additional interesting information [here](#).

There is more information about on-line ways of bringing the National Park to households during Covid lockdown periods on a special web-page, [here](#).

Dark Skies Festival (12-28 February)

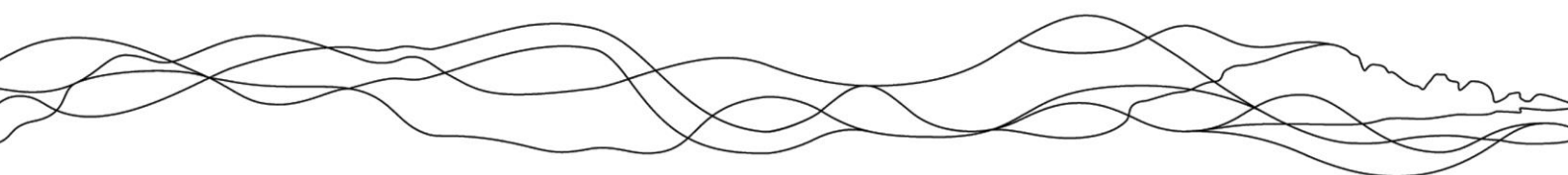
Following the success of on-line 'virtual' festivals last year, plans are being finalised to make the 2021 Dark Skies Festival as inspirational as possible. The Festival will run from Friday 12 until Sunday 28 February. Instead of local events, this year's festival will be much more about people's personal experience of a starry sky, and how to make the most of it from their back garden or on a local walk. Features will include:

- watching a new short film on our journey to become an International Dark Skies Reserve
- providing live tours of the night sky from South Downs Planetarium,
- learning about the wildlife that comes out at night
- exploring how the night sky boosts our well-being and the sense of our place in the universe by live interviews with authors Jo Marchant and Tiffany Baker
- showcasing the winning photographs from our astrophotography competition
- running a big Dark Skies Quiz throughout the fortnight with the opportunity to win a telescope
- Pinterest boards on Gardening for Nocturnal Wildlife and the Folklore of the constellations
- short films and tips about what we can do to preserve our Dark Night Skies.

More information can be found on the SDNPA website, [here](#).

Gathering evidence about Scheduled Monuments

Wessex Archaeology have been commissioned to gather data on behalf of SDNPA, Historic England and the National Trust to inform a Scheduled Monument monitoring and recording project. There are approximately 575 Scheduled Monuments in the National Park. Scheduled Monuments are nationally important archaeological sites, protected by legislation, but many are vulnerable to damage and decline through farming practices (both historic and current) and increases in outdoor recreational activities. It is hoped funding can be secured to deliver a multi-year project to address some of the issues in the future.



House of Commons adjournment debate

There was a special item of business in Parliament on January 15th to mark the 10th year of the South Downs National Park. Led by Andrew Griffiths MP and with input from Defra Minister Rebecca Pow it was a very positive event, identifying many achievements by SDNPA over that period. The Minister noted that the pandemic was highlighting the critical role that National Parks play in national health and wellbeing and she made a particular point of praising the NPA's COVID recovery fund and other "inventive and helpful things such as virtual festivals and other online work". She concluded that "there are some really exciting opportunities for the South Downs going forward". Here is a [link](#) to the item.

Covid Recovery grants

In my note circulated in June 2020 I explained that, in May, the National Park Authority had initiated a new Recovery Fund to help with support in response to potential impacts of the virus on the landscape and rural economy. Contacts with farmers, rural businesses and cultural organisations had indicated the urgent need for such assistance and that the NPA's swift attention would be greatly appreciated – even though the limited amounts of funding could, inevitably, only scratch the surface of the wide range of needs. Funding was available for each of five themed areas: Access; Cultural Heritage; Landscape & Biodiversity; Sustainable Economy & Tourism; and Connecting People & Communities. Over 100 valid applications were received with approaching £300,000 awarded to over 60 different businesses / organisations across the National Park. In addition, a separate fund was also set up for collections at risk and 14 museums, galleries and heritage sites received about £20,000. Although the individual awards were often only a few thousand pounds, feedback indicates that they have made a real difference on the ground in helping small businesses, visitor attractions and others to adapt.

Also related to Covid-19, the SDNPA's Memorial Hall in the South Downs Centre at Midhurst has recently been turned into an 18-bay Vaccination Centre which is due to be used by the Midhurst Pharmacy from 30 January with some SDNPA staff available to help as marshals.

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 still 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 [here](#).

Local contacts

The Planning Link Officer for East Hampshire is Jean Chambers with contact details 01730 819371 and Jean.Chambers@southdowns.gov.uk. The NPA's Western Downs team acts as a 'first stop shop' for land managers and communities, 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.

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