

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Parish & Town Councils July 2021

In the absence of the normal quarterly meetings of EHAPTC during the Covid-19 Pandemic, I have circulated notes about some of the activities of the National Park Authority (NPA) which I thought may be of interest to Parish Councils and their communities. The EHAPTC AGM now provides another opportunity for an update.

Newsletters and communications

Parish Clerks and others receive copies of the SDNPA e-Newsletters (*South Downs News*) and anyone can sign up to have the [newsletter delivered to their inbox](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/publications/south-downs-news-the-newsletter-for-the-national-park/) 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-work/publications/south-downs-news-the-newsletter-for-the-national-park/>

These newsletters have been produced every month throughout the period of the pandemic.

Parishes should also be receiving copies of the NPA's Planning Newsletter (the most recent edition [Spring 2021] is available [here](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-newsletter/)) and others can subscribe to receive these newsletters via this link: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-newsletter/>

Publication of the twice-yearly magazine, 'South Downs View', has also continued during the pandemic. The most recent edition can be read via [this link](#) or downloaded [here](#).

In place of the normal twice-yearly, county-based Parish Workshop meetings, a series of on-line events have been held including a 'virtual' workshop towards the end of 2020, a webinar devoted to Dark Skies issues in April (which can still be viewed [here](#)) and a further 'virtual' workshop meeting last month. As well as presentations about visitor management, nature recovery, CIL project arrangements and a planning update, this recent workshop allowed a full hour for questions on any topics which included biodiversity gains, gateway signage, rights of way issues and problems on BOATs.

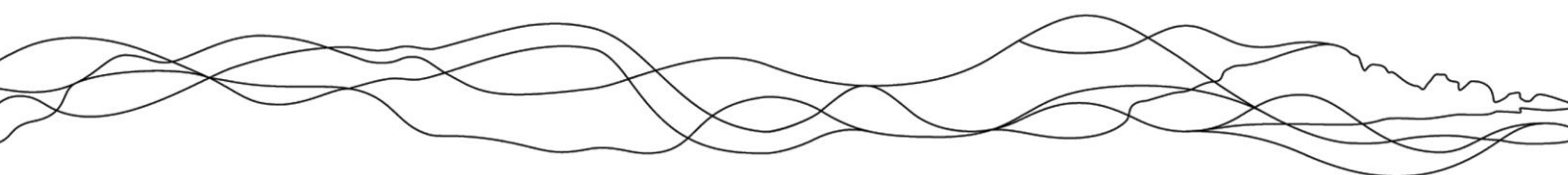
For the future the NPA is considering a mix of the long-standing Workshop Meetings and more webinar events – with the latter enabling communities (not just Parish Councils) to look at key subjects in more depth, share ideas and learn from each other. It may be possible to hold some of the Workshop Meetings on-line as well (to reduce travelling etc) and the views of Parish Councils would be welcomed.

The SDNPA's Annual Review for 2020/21 highlights some of the key achievements of the year along with case studies and a year-end financial round-up and will soon be available via the website and in hard-copy format.

NPA Meetings

During the pandemic the NPA's Memorial Hall in the South Downs Centre at Midhurst was turned into an 18-bay Vaccination Centre and was used by the Midhurst Pharmacy for a number of months with some SDNPA staff available to help as marshals.

In common with local authorities throughout the country, all the NPA's public meetings during the Covid restrictions were held online and could be viewed using webcasting links. Meetings of the Planning Committee, the Policy & Resources Committee and of the full National Park Authority have now recommenced in public in Midhurst with appropriate social distancing measures in place.



To complement the other sources of information referred to above I will simply highlight the following:

- Planning: consultation on draft Design Guide (Supplementary Planning Document)
- Launch of new #ReNature campaign
- New funding for farmers and land managers
- Establishment of a new South Downs Partnership
- BOATs (Byways Open to All Traffic)
- South Downs Youth Action days
- Some other new initiatives
- Funding for local projects
- Local contacts.

Planning: consultation on draft Design Guide (Supplementary Planning Document)

The NPA has prepared a draft 'Design Guide' which, when adopted, will become a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for consideration in all planning applications. The SPD provides guidance to support the implementation of South Downs Local Plan policy SD5 (Design). The consultation draft is available for ten weeks with comments being sought by Monday 6 September. Comments can be sent by email to planningpolicy@southdowns.gov.uk or in writing to The South Downs Centre, North Street, Midhurst, GU29 9DH and marked for the attention of Mark Waller-Gutierrez. The draft will be reviewed after receipt of public responses and a report prepared for the NPA's Planning Committee which will be asked to consider adoption of the Design Guide. Details are available via this link:

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/public-consultation-design-supplementary-planning-document-spd/>

Launch of new #ReNature campaign

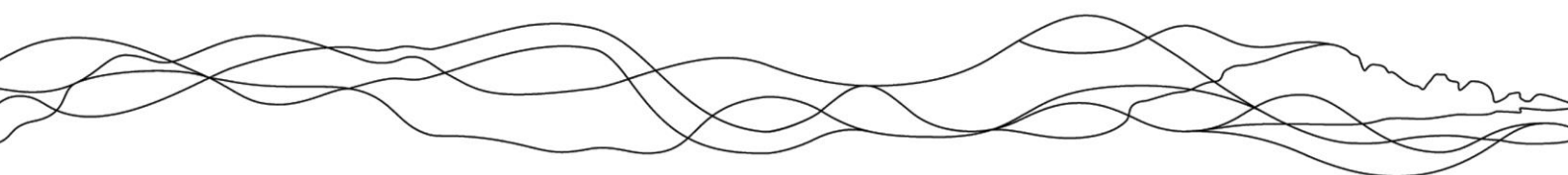
In a major initiative to tackle the biodiversity crisis and create new habitats, the NPA has launched an inspiring campaign to "renature" the National Park and create new havens for wildlife to flourish. A short film, to be shown on cinema screens across the region, has been produced to commence the initiative and it can be also be viewed [here](#). The campaign is part of an ambitious Nature Recovery Programme for the South Downs which includes a wildlife delivery plan, a prospective 'call for nature sites' and funding from a range of sources. The initiative was approved by the NPA's Policy & Resources Committee earlier in July as part of a wide-ranging report ([available here](#)) and a briefing note for partners (including Parish Councils) is [available here](#).

New funding for farmers and land managers

A new scheme to support nature-friendly farming and sustainability was announced by Defra recently and the NPA will be delivering the programme in the South Downs, one of fewer than fifty parts of the country eligible to take part. The programme will run between July 2021 and March 2024 (with applications open from 1 July). Funding is available for nature recovery, for tackling climate change, for improving access and for improving cultural heritage/sense of place. Farmers and land managers are now being encouraged to apply and more details are available [here](#).

Establishment of new South Downs Partnership

The NPA is committed to working in partnership with stakeholders and has recently established a new body to help achieve this. The South Downs Partnership is made up of representatives from different sectors, all with an important stake in the future of the South Downs National Park. The group will work alongside the SDNPA to: champion the National Park and the outcomes set out in its Partnership Management Plan (PMP); broaden and deepen engagement with the National Park, in particular through the active involvement of individuals and groups for whom its relevance and potential benefits have been limited until now; mobilise additional resources and commitments for the highest priorities within the PMP; maintain an overview of progress towards PMP outcomes, identifying weak areas and helping to address them; provide a forum for resolving conflicts between competing policy objectives or sectors; and give strategic advice and feedback to the NPA. More details are available [here](#).



BOATs (Byways Open to All Traffic)

One of the main topics raised in the discussion periods of both of the most recent Parish Council Workshop meetings for Hampshire parishes (in 2020 and 2021) was adverse effects of BOATs in the East Hampshire part of the National Park. Following the most recent meeting, the NPA Chair (Ian Phillips) and NPA officers have agreed to (1) contact HCC's Jonathan Woods (Strategic Manager for Countryside Access) to find out what has been done since a joint meeting about this topic in May 2018 and (2) arrange a meeting between Ian Phillips and Cllr Manns or Cllr Heron at HCC to discuss the matter and consider any courses of action needed by each party in the future. I have asked that there should be a third step in the process: a meeting with representatives of parishes affected (with people from both SDNPA and HCC) so that there is full understanding of the issues and potential next steps.

South Downs Youth Action days

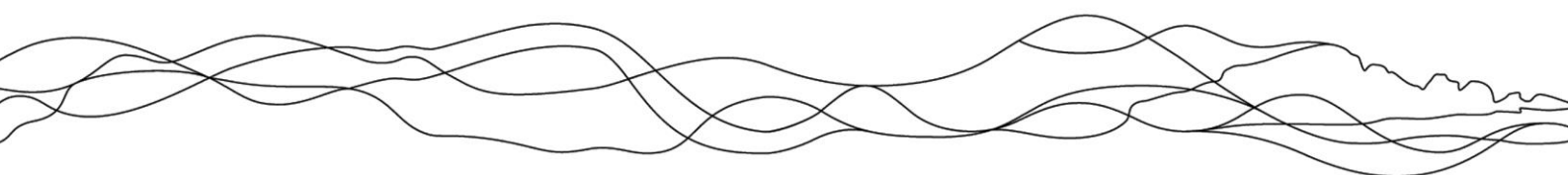
Bookings have recently opened for a programme of free Youth Action days in the National Park this summer and autumn. Open to all young people aged 16-25, the South Downs Youth Action initiative offers fun, practical activities in a range of locations where young people can meet other young people and make a positive difference to the environment, whilst learning new skills along the way. There are events and activities on Butser Hill, at the Weald & Downland Museum, on St Catherine's Hill at Winchester, in Midhurst and elsewhere in Sussex. Please share this information with your networks of young people, and signpost them to [the National Park's Eventbrite page to book a place](#). All events are free and reasonable public transport expenses and lunch expenses are covered. Please contact volunteering@southdowns.gov.uk if you have any questions.

Some other new initiatives include:

- The NPA has launched a new **Health & Wellbeing Strategy** and is working with partners to help increase access to green spaces and to provide people with more opportunities to get outside. Spending time outdoors is increasingly recognised as being good for our health and wellbeing and the strategy addresses both physical and mental health issues. A copy of the strategy can be read [here](#) and a summary is available [here](#).
- The NPA has provided some funding, support and advice to **the Petersfield Museum** which is now back open for visitors following a major £4m redevelopment. Some information about the re-vamped galleries and collections (and an exciting new outdoor space in the courtyard) can be found [here](#)
- The **Wild Chalk Festival** returns this year with a four-day on-line programme celebrating the unique plants and animals that live in the globally-rare habitat of chalk grassland: including short films and live action with a range of experts bringing inspiring footage straight from the South Downs. More details of the event (which runs from Thursday 22 July to Sunday 25 July) can be found [here](#)

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.

Doug Jones, Member of the South Downs National Park Authority and Buriton Parish Council
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July 2021

