



**South Downs**

National Park Authority

**Agenda Item 10**  
**Report NPA21/22-01**

Report to	<b>South Downs National Park Authority</b>
Date	<b>6 July 2021</b>
By	<b>Chief Executive Officer</b>
Title of Report <b>Note</b>	<b>Chief Executive's Progress Report</b>

**Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to note the progress made by the South Downs National Park Authority (the Authority) since the last report**

## **1. Summary and Background**

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the work that has been underway since my report to the 25 March 2021 NPA.

## **2. Introduction**

- 2.1 There has been a huge amount of activity across the organisation over the last few months working with Defra to support the Ministerial Statement of 24 June, which provided an initial response to the Glover Review and launched the associated Farming in Protected Landscapes programme. I have written separately about this in a note to all Members so I will not repeat the details here. It is, however, worth noting that the experience has generated strong links at every level across Government and that the release of the Statement signals a more open and proactive phase of engagement.
- 2.2 The next stage is for us to become as closely involved as possible in the Department's preparation of the promised consultation document, both as SDNPA and through National Parks England. This document, which Defra plan for the summer, will respond to the whole of the Glover Review, covering the many topics that they did not have space to include in the Ministerial Statement. The task now is for us all to focus on delivery whilst doing all we can to ensure that Defra registers the whole range of our work and awards proper credit for the innovation and vision that we are developing here in the South Downs.
- 2.3 Members will hear at this meeting about the launch of our Nature Recovery Campaign and the imminent transfer of Seven Sisters. This, alongside our major new support for farmers, will generate national attention for our innovative work on nature recovery, just as we have done with our viticulture report, which was debated in Parliament on 23 June. In this way, we will build locally upon the positives in the Ministerial Statement and develop a strong profile in the forthcoming consultation.

## **3. Planning**

- 3.1 Year-end **planning performance** is subject to a comprehensive report at Policy and Resources Committee on 15 July so I will keep my comments here short. I am pleased to report however that planning performance continues to be strong with all government targets being met. This is despite difficulties the pandemic has brought in the year, such as the suspension of site visits for a time during the first nationwide lockdown. Our appeal

performance in the financial year was good and we continue to see strong support from Inspectors for the ground breaking policies in our Local Plan.

- 3.2 In terms of the **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**, which Members will recall we are the only National Park to operate, £1.836m has been collected in the 2020/21 financial year (compared to £1.877m in 2019/20). This was despite a number of deferrals of payments being granted in line with Government guidance on account of the economic impact of the pandemic.
- 3.3 In accordance with England-wide CIL regulations payments are made to our parishes from CIL receipts twice a year. These direct payments to parishes are made before SDNPA's share of the levy is allocated by the Planning Committee. In April 2021 £306k was distributed to 23 parishes across the Park, providing Parish and Town Councils with important funds for improvements in their areas.
- 3.4 In June **Planning Committee** had its first face to face meeting since March 2020. With the Memorial Hall at the South Downs Centre currently acting as a vaccination centre this meeting was held in Lewes Town Hall. This enabled us to hold a Covid-safe meeting with the added benefit of being able to consider the significant Old Malling Farm application in the town itself. The meeting was broadcast live on YouTube, and it was impressive that Member Services, the Committee Members and planning officers had together managed to move the whole operation to Lewes in this way.
- 3.5 We have recently adopted a **Parking Supplementary Planning Document (SPDs)** which covers car and cycle parking for both residential and non-residential development. The SPD adds further detail and guidance on the policies in our Local Plan and joins two other existing SPDs on Affordable Housing and Sustainable Construction.
- 3.6 In relation to the proposal for an extension to the **Rampion** offshore windfarm Rampion will be presenting their proposal to Members at a meeting later in July and Rampion will be undertaking a public consultation between 14 July and 16 September. Whilst the benefits of the scheme in terms of renewable energy generation are clear, there remains concern regarding the landscape and seascape impact the turbines would have on the National Park, in particular on the Sussex Heritage Coast, as well as concern regarding the direct impact the proposed onshore cabling route would have on the National Park. Officers will continue to work with the applicant to try and address these issues.
- 3.7 Previous reports have described **Esso's** plans for an underground aviation oil pipeline between Fawley refinery in Southampton and Heathrow Airport. This would replace an existing pipeline and will run across 25km of the National Park in Hampshire, entering west of Bishops Waltham and leaving adjacent to Chawton. The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy granted the Development Consent Order in October 2020. This is only the second such Order granted in the National Park, the other being the original Rampion windfarm and the onshore cabling that passes through the National Park.
- 3.8 Esso have indicated that they will be carrying out main construction works to build the pipeline in 2022. The **Development Consent Order** requires further details on a number of operational matters (Construction Traffic Management Plan, Construction Environmental Management Plan, Archaeology, Landscape Ecological Management Plan and Community Engagement Plan) to be submitted to the Authority for approval - in much the same way as conditions apply to planning permissions. These details follow pre-application discussions and officers have 6 weeks to determine the applications.
- 3.9 Work has now restarted on the Area Action Plan (AAP) for **Shoreham Cement Works**. A project plan for the AAP has been completed and we are now looking to establish a Task & Finish Group to drive this work forward. The purpose of the group would be to oversee the development of the AAP that delivers the allocation of an exemplar sustainable development and a substantially enhanced landscape. The intention is for the Task & Finish Group to meet on Thursday 29th July to discuss the development scenarios for the site. It will then meet in at least six weekly intervals, however the timetable will be driven by the evidence base as it becomes available.

3.10 In April, WCC, in partnership with SDNP, celebrated a notable result at the High Court relating to an extremely sensitive planning issue at **Long Road, Soberton**. Both parties had been taking planning enforcement action over many years against those occupying an area of land as a residence unlawfully. On 8 April the High Court confirmed that those responsible must comply with the requirements set out in the Injunction obtained to enforce the planning requirements. Importantly, the outcome of this is that the occupants have moved from the site. The Authority was praised by Mr Justice Cavanagh for its ‘reasonable approach’ during the summing up.

#### 4. Progress of Existing Projects

4.1 We have made excellent progress towards the formation of the new **South Downs Partnership (SDP)**. The former Permanent Secretary of Defra, Clare Moriarty, has accepted the role of Independent Chair and we are privileged to have someone with so much knowledge and experience to help us in this way. Of the fifteen roles on the Partnership, all but two (biodiversity and health & wellbeing) have been filled, and names are being approached for these. Thanks are due to all the officers and Members who have suggested names and made approaches.

4.2 The range of individuals on the new SDP bring with them a great diversity of experience, background and expertise. This is an important step in creating a more open and inclusive SDNPA and National Park. The first, virtual, meeting of the SDP will take place on 7 July and will include an introduction to the PMP, a discussion about how it can feed into the Government consultation mentioned above and support the Nature Recovery Campaign. The latter provides an early opportunity for the SDP to add value by spreading the message, championing the issue and bringing it to wider audiences. There will be four SDP meetings a year, mirroring the annual cycle of SDNPA business, and, though independent, we will be looking to create at least one event where members and the SDP can get together.

4.3 As we transition from the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to a new agricultural support system, farming is going through a significant period of change. To help farmers and land managers in the country’s protected landscapes during this time and in recognition of the role they play in managing these areas, Defra has developed the **Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)** programme, which will run from July 2021 to March 2024. Through the programme, farmers and land managers within protected landscapes can apply for funding to carry out projects that:

- support nature recovery
- mitigate the impacts of climate change
- provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and cultural heritage
- support nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses.

4.4 FiPL is open to all farmers and land managers (including from the private, public and charity sectors) where activity on the ground can bring benefit to one or more of the above objectives. It is important to recognise that it is a programme of funding for one-off projects, not an agri-environment scheme, and will work alongside – not in competition with – Defra’s existing and new schemes, adding value where it is most needed. A ‘National Framework’ document has been developed by Defra to ensure consistency in aspects of governance and decision-making across all protected landscapes, while respecting local priorities and expertise.

4.5 Within the South Downs National Park, FiPL will be delivered by the Authority’s Farming Team. A Local Assessment Panel, comprising predominately of farmers, is being developed. The Panel will meet regularly to decide on which projects, based on guidance from Defra and relevance to our Partnership Management Plan, should be supported. For the first year of the programme, applications can be received from 1st July 2021 until 31st January 2022.

4.6 At a national level, it will be essential for FiPL to demonstrate what protected landscapes can deliver collectively, putting into practice recommendations of the Landscapes Review

through facilitating greater coordination and joint-working across National Parks and AONBs.

## 5. Volunteers and Delivery

- 5.1 Since the last CEO's report the National Park has not experienced the frequency or intensity of **anti-social issues** encountered in the lockdowns of last year. Over the last two months as society has gradually begun to reopen, providing people with greater choice in where to go and what to do, the number of reports received from area rangers and members of the public relating to anti-social behaviour has generally declined each week. Despite this trend, when issues have arisen, their impact on the landscapes, habitats and communities of the National Park are still significant. Issues over this last quarter have included; inconsiderate roadside / verge parking resulting in the obstruction of highways, people not keeping to public rights of way or areas of access land, illegal camping and fly-tipping. A number of farmers have liaised with their area ranger over this quarter to express their concerns about dogs not under control.
- 5.2 Whilst the last year has brought challenges from the behaviour of a small proportion of visitors, it has also led to many people visiting the National Park for the first time. We continue to use positive communications and engagement to welcome and support first time visitors and promote responsible behaviour. At the start of the summer we launched our **Visitor Management Plan**, which included – clear, positive communications, presence on the ground at hotspots, providing onsite support at key locations and promoting local businesses.
- 5.3 Our **Happy Nature, Happy You, Happy South Downs** campaign has been very well received by both the public and land managers. To date the team has spoken to 2,000 people at over 23 events at hotspots across the National Park. We have promoted the unfortunately rather lacklustre revised Countryside Code, and have been involved in a project with all 15 UK National Parks called "Love Your Litter" which encourages younger visitors to take their litter home and to leave no trace.
- 5.4 **Volunteering** has now resumed with continued limitations on tasks and volunteer numbers. This will be reviewed again in line with Government and SDNPA guidance after 19 July. Volunteer Ranger Service groups are operating to a limit of 6 people to maintain consistency across the SDNPA's programmes and to ensure task sites and public access are not blocked up with personal vehicles. Feedback from area teams has confirmed this is an effective policy.
- 5.5 The first round of awards for the **South Downs Youth Action Fund (YAF)** have been approved by a panel which includes staff and our two youth ambassador volunteers. Projects include funding for visits to Butser Ancient Farm for Brighton's Young Archaeologists Group, a litter picking and cycling mission for a youth group in Petworth and a night under the stars for a group of young women near Chichester. The YAF is being funded through the SDNP Trust and includes grant funding from #iWill4Nature and Clarion Futures.
- 5.6 The first posting to the **micro-volunteering** mailing list was sent out in April. This is a public list which will be the core communications mechanism encouraging people to support flexible volunteering initiatives. These initiatives include the new NPUK-wide iNaturalist project LookWild, which launched in May. Members of the public can download the iNaturalist app and post sightings to the project, building a web of species records and community science in National Parks.

## 6. Corporate Update

- 6.1 To date, the Midhurst Pharmacy team have vaccinated 33,000 patients through the **Memorial Hall**. During June the vaccination centre have been operating 5 days a week to achieve this figure. Recently the team managed to vaccinate over 1000 people in one day, a record so far. Some staff are volunteering with marshalling.
- 6.2 OMT are currently looking at the changes we may need to our policies and procedures in order to offer a **Blended Working Model** to staff which meets organisational needs alongside supporting as far as possible, individual requests for working more flexibly and

remotely. A small OMT working group met in May and agreed key principles which are currently being developed. The proposals will then be presented to staff at the autumn all staff event. The goal is to implement changes from October 2021.

- 6.3 Work has been progressing on the legal transfer of **Seven Sisters Country Park** from East Sussex County Council to the SDNPA. We submitted a planning application in May 2020 which was granted permission in October 2020. A Heads of Terms was agreed with ESCC and presented to the Secretary of State in August which resulted in formal approval from the Secretary of State of both DEFRA and MHCLG before Christmas. The formal process of legal conveyance with ESCC started in January and is close to completion. We hope to exchange contracts in early July. Following ownership we will start our agreed Phase I building works, with contractors starting in July/August and completing in early 2022.
- 6.4 We have produced a Landscape Management Plan which is due for external public engagement during the summer of 2021. This will become a working document for delivery by the Seven Sisters ranger team as soon as we become owners. We are also producing a visitor experience plan that will feed into our day to day operational considerations of how we manage, engage and involve our visitors to ensure we provide the best possible experience.
- 6.5 Seven Sisters will be operated by the newly formed trading company. This is to be incorporated in late June, though will not take over operation of the site until January 2022 to coincide with the completion of phase I of the works. The company is owned entirely by the Authority though will have its own board, 4 of whom (maximum of 6) are appointed by the Authority. The company will enable the site to be operated in a more commercial way whilst still delivering on the Authority's purposes and duty.
- 6.6 With the commitment made to become a carbon neutral organisation by 2025 within the adopted **SDNPA Sustainability Policy**, a pre pandemic carbon and greenhouse gas assessment was carried out for the SDNPA. It found we produce around 130 tons of Co2 a year. As well as addressing our output through adopting technology, sourcing and reduction in the action plan, we are seeking guidance from the Carbon Trust on how we can offset some of our inevitable carbon outputs. The aim is to be not just carbon neutral but carbon positive as we reduce our carbon output and then offset within the National Park, providing other benefits to the environment at a local level. I will keep Members posted on this development which we hope will encourage other individuals and organisations to do the same.
- 6.7 By the end of the last financial year, the **Income Generation** team had secured just under £1.7 million for National Park projects. Of this, just over £1.1 million was secured through statutory sources, including support for the Egrets Way, a landscape improvement initiative in Woolbeding and funding for Charleston, through our assistance and support for their access improvement bid to the Get Britain Building Fund. In addition, the Trust secured £534,000. From this, the Trust made contributions of £370,000 for SDNPA projects, with additional funding distributed to our partners.
- 6.8 This year we are off to a flying start, with £420,000 already secured, the majority of this is currently sitting with the Trust. In addition, we have just over £1.7 million in submitted bids. This includes a large and small bid to the second Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The large bid "Downs to the Sea" seeks to establish and restore 21 nature/dew ponds, fund capital works to improve Pulborough Brooks and Pagham harbour and work with the Arun and Rother Rivers Trust to reduce pollutants entering the catchment. The smaller project, "Hampshire's Hedgerows", seeks to restore hedges across the Selborne and Winchester Farm Clusters.
- 6.9 We have just held three **County-based parish workshops** to update parishes on key areas of work for the Authority and to host a Q&A session where parishes can ask questions on those issues and other relevant issues. The topics for this round have been our visitor management campaign, including detailing our pop-up events for the summer, our nature recovery work, an update and information on CIL and wider national and local

developments in planning. These county-based meeting followed on from our first successful parish webinar on Dark Night Skies. At these webinars we examine a single topic in detail and provide an opportunity for parishes to share learning and experiences. We are now beginning work on our next parish webinar on nature recovery and which will take place on 13 October

## **7. Media and Communications**

- 7.1 We continue to deliver against our three **public affairs objectives**: future of farming, nature recovery and engaging young people. We are putting the finishing touches to our Nature Recovery Campaign which will launch on 5 July and will form the basis for information and engaging people with our nature recovery work, while we also engage with partners and work towards a call for sites in the last Autumn. I will show Members at the Meeting the new animation which is the focus of this campaign.
- 7.2 The past quarter has been strong for **media coverage**, with the launch of several initiatives, including the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the new Trees for the Downs campaign, the revamped Serpent Trail and the new “In Their Footsteps” walking app. We have had 152 separate pieces of coverage, reaching 4.8m people with an equivalent advertising value of £96,000.
- 7.3 *South Downs National Park Ranger Walks*, produced by Harper Collins with the help of our rangers and communications team, is flying off the shelves nationally and is already on the second reprint, just a month after launch. The book is the best-selling among all the guides produced for National Parks.
- 7.4 Our revised website and focus on digital continues to pay dividends, with unique visitors to our website almost doubling between March to May 2020 and March to May this year (482,956, up from 247,423 in 2020). The careful management of our social media channels also continues to show results, with followers increasing from 42,375 in May 2020 to 58,859 in May 2021. We reach an average of over 222,000 people through our social media.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 As with previous reports, my aim has been to provide an overview of the highlights of the busy period since my report to the 25 March NPA, leaving Members to follow up any issues on which they would like more detail or which they would like to discuss further at the Meeting.

### **TREVOR BEATTIE Chief Executive Officer South Downs National Park Authority**

Contact Officer:	Trevor Beattie
Tel:	01730 819313
email:	<a href="mailto:trevor.beattie@southdowns.gov.uk">trevor.beattie@southdowns.gov.uk</a>
Appendices	None
SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive; Director of Countryside Policy & Management; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services, Business Service Manager
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	<b>N/A</b>