

Report to **Policy & Resources Committee**  
Date **19 July 2022**  
By **Communications & Engagement Manager**  
Title of Report **Review of Public Affairs Strategy**  
Decision

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**Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to**

**Recommend the revised Public Affairs Strategy 2022-24, as set out at Appendix I, including the two priority issues to be the focus of the Authority's proactive public affairs work for the period 2022-24, for approval by the NPA**

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**I. Introduction**

- I.1 In December 2017, the National Park Authority agreed its first Public Affairs Strategy. An interim review was carried out in 2019 and the strategy was fully reviewed in 2020. You can find the current strategy as agreed in 2020, at **Appendix 2**
- I.2 In 2020, it was agreed that the strategy would be reviewed in 2022 to assess how we had done against our set objectives and to identify whether the objectives set in 2020 were still relevant given the fast-changing policy environment.
- I.3 The first part of this paper looks at how we have performed against the existing objectives. The second part of this paper looks at the objectives and proposed priority areas going forward. The proposed revised Public Affairs Strategy 2022-24 can be found in full at **Appendix I**.
- I.4 In determining what to choose as our public affairs objectives it is important to remember that these are the issues that we determine can most be influenced by public affairs work (ie influencing policy, practice and opinion) and is not an indication of the prominence of these issues over others. Each objective has got to pass three crucial tests as agreed by Members:
- Do we have a clear leadership role to play?
  - Do we have a genuine ability to influence?
  - Is the issue time critical?
- I.5 These objectives do not indicate organisational or delivery priorities, which are set in the Corporate Plan nor wider Communications & Engagement priorities which have been set in the Communications & Engagement Strategy.
- I.6 It is also important to say that public affairs work takes time and so we must be mindful to ensure that we choose a small number of targeted objectives to pursue rather than attempting to cover everything and achieving less.
- I.7 This paper has been developed with input and expertise from across the organisation. A key step in determining how we have performed has been to gather together the public affairs

work carried out at all levels of the organisation, and I am grateful to the Members and many officers who have fed in to the collation of this information.

## **2. Aims of the Public Affairs Strategy**

2.1 The current, and proposed Public Affairs work Strategy for the SDNPA has three key purposes. To:

- ensure a coordinated and targeted approach to our public affairs work to enable the Authority to influence policy and decision making on agreed strategic issues affecting the National Park;
- identify the key public affairs issues that we will proactively work on over the next two years; and
- set out guiding principles for how we can effectively and quickly deal with emerging issues so that the Authority can respond to challenges and be ready to grasp opportunities

## **3. Reviewing the current Public Affairs Strategy**

3.1 The current Public Affairs Strategy objectives were grouped under the three priority areas of:

- Future of Farming
- Engaging Young People with Nature
- Nature Recovery

### **3.2 Future of Farming**

3.2.1 What did we set out to achieve?

- To ensure that any new scheme(s) gives the same or better support to the environment as current schemes, and are expanded to include cultural heritage, access and education.
- Farm clusters within the National Park to become innovative test beds for potential agri-environment schemes in lowland landscapes.

3.2.2 How have we done?

- Through Defra's Environmental Land Management (ELM) Tests & Trials, the SDNPA has delivered two projects with the South Downs farming community:
  - A series of seven farmer workshops to discuss and evaluate the building blocks of ELM. The workshops were attended by 125 farmers, land managers and advisors and directly fed into the development of ELM. Reports were compiled based on the information given by participants and submitted to Defra for both ELM T&Ts to inform on-going scheme design. For each project a series of key recommendations were highlighted
  - A project with four farmer clusters (20 farmers) in the SDNP to assess how The Land App, an online mapping tool designed to appraise and plan on-farm activities, could be used to evaluate datasets and collectively plan the delivery of public goods at a landscape scale. For this purpose, each group focused on a particular public good related to their operational plan – public access, pollinators, resource protection and priority (chalk) grassland). The farmer cluster/Land App T&T demonstrated how farmer clusters can, and are, coordinating and delivering public goods at a landscape scale.
- Developed a FiPL delivery model that has been recognised by Defra as a national exemplar and we have been one of the few protected landscapes to have allocated 100% of the funding to over 70 farm projects, demonstrating our ability to deliver on policy in practice.

- One member has pushed for the need to support sustainable farming in protected landscapes through their role on the CLA Sussex and CLA Environment (national) committee, and through direct liaison with the architect of ELM at Defra.

### 3.3 Nature Recovery

#### 3.3.1 What did we set out to achieve?

We wanted our People and Nature Network bringing partners together and sitting at the heart of successful nature recovery in the South East.

- Local authorities in and around the National Park to:
  - (alongside other key partners) sign up to the South Downs People and Nature Network (PANN);
  - commit to enhance their public open space for the benefit of nature and access/people using the PANN evidence to target the areas that offer the greatest benefits;
  - work with the National Park to develop and implement county-based Local Nature Recovery Strategy(ies);
  - “call for sites” for biodiversity net gain to be included in the county-based Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
- Defra to define a single carbon metric for all habitat types.

#### 3.3.2 How have we done?

- There are active environmental partnerships and progress in 11 of the 12 Natural Capital Investment areas (NCIAs)
- Training for local authority staff in increasing the natural capital provision of public spaces.
- Health audits for 8 Public Open Space sites
- Toolkit for LAs and others to use for increasing Natural capital in public greenspaces.
- New access routes and accessible natural greenspace in development in NCIA 1 – East Winchester for example.
- Influenced a pan-Sussex approach to be taken by WSCC and ESCC + BHCC
- Pilot study and business plan of Renaturing 450 acres of Broadreed Farm.
- LEP funding of £65k secured to develop further Renaturing for estate/farms.
- Supporting developing projects of payment for ecosystem services enabling Nature recovery (nitrates, phosphates, carbon) totalling 573 he
- Senior Officers have liaised directly with Defra officials to both explain and promote our approach to Nature Recovery in the SDNP.
- I have championed the importance of the SDNP and other SE Protected Landscapes to LNRS in meetings with the Leaders and Senior Officers of WSCC, ESCC and HCC.
- Some parish and local authority members have been active in encouraging parishes to consider local sites for nature recovery and their local authority to be more ambitious in setting their biodiversity net gain targets.
- As part of National Parks England we are working to develop Principles (for England) for Private Investment into Natural Capital in order to maximise the potential benefits for nature, landholders and communities from private investment in nature restoration.

### 3.4 **Engaging Young People with Nature**

#### 3.4.1 What did we set out to achieve?

Young people will have greater opportunities to engage with nature and the National Park.

- Partner organisations to sign up to South Downs Youth Action:
  - provide opportunities for young people to engage with nature;
  - create youth volunteer or apprenticeship roles; and
  - provide opportunities for youth voices in their Governance
- Further education sector to sign up to South Downs Youth Action and commit to sharing information and guiding young people towards the three Youth Action opportunities.

#### 3.4.2 How have we done?

- The SDNPA CEO is the lead officer for the NPUK Learning and Engagement Working Group and we have used that role to push support for a UK wide approach to engaging young people with nature and youth action. We have worked through Generation Green (as part of the National Park family), with other National Parks and the YHA to set up the inaugural NPUK Youth Voice Group. This group has inputted into national consultations and is now an online forum
- Extended SD Youth Action programme:
  - 20 SDYA day events held from July–November 2021 engaging a total of 248 young people
  - Recruited 4 more youth ambassadors (taking total to 6), working with partners, Sussex Clubs for Young People to train new youth ambassadors.
  - 3 Youth Ambassadors attended the inaugural NPUK Youth Voice conference in the Peak District in March
- The Youth Action Fund supported 13 organisations across the SDNP including a SDNP discovery project with young refugees and asylum seekers, young people with complex needs taking part in heathland conservation, a youth group litter picking by bike, a Space to Breathe summer camp for girls with mental health challenges and young people with learning disabilities creating Great Outdoor films.
- Through Member and Partnership contacts we have brokered connection between SDNPA officers and local FE colleges and networks across Sussex and made direct connections to 3 FE colleges who are now actively promoting the youth action programme.
- Senior Officers have liaised directly with Defra officials to both explain and promote our approach to engaging young people with nature and on wider national park for all related issues emerging as part of the Glover Review.
- As lead on Education issues, we have played a key role in advocating for the importance of supporting young people to connect with nature through initiatives such as Generation Green.

3.5 The current priorities were then reviewed by Officers to identify if they were issues where we could continue to create change in policy, practice and opinion through our public affairs work:

- **Future of farming:** It was considered that while the future of farming remains a key area of work for the SDNPA, that the time to significantly influence new policy and practice on the development of ELM had passed.
- **Engaging Young People with Nature:** It was considered that while young people remain a key target audience that there no clear public affairs objectives going forward and instead the focus should be broadened to the wider topic of National Park for All.

- **Nature Recovery:** It was considered that policy and practice is still actively being developed around this topic and that it should continue to be a public affairs area of focus for the SDNPA, albeit with different objectives. It was also felt that we needed to reflect the intertwined nature of much of our own work on nature and climate and how policy and practice for these two intermeshed issues is being developed.

#### 4. Key Issues

4.1 Working with colleagues across the organisation and after much careful consideration, SMT proposed two areas that would provide the strongest potential for positive change through targeted public affairs work over the next two years. These key issues are set out in full detail in the attached revised Public Affairs Strategy (Appendix 1) but are set out in summary below.

#### 4.2 Nature and Climate

##### 4.2.1 Why this issue?

Nature is increasingly under pressure, and we urgently need to reverse its decline. At present, just 25% of the National Park is managed for nature, and the National Park Authority has therefore adopted an ambitious target to increase this to 33% by renaturing 13,000 hectares of land by 2030. Nature also holds the key to successfully responding to climate change. Biodiversity loss and climate change do not recognise administrative boundaries. A regional response to biodiversity loss and climate change is needed if we are to ensure nature everywhere, for everyone, and to provide nature-based solutions to climate changes that the National Park and the wider South East is already experiencing. We want the National Park to sit at the heart of nature recovery and climate action in the region. National Parks also sit at the heart of the nation's nature recovery network and climate vision and we will work as part of the wider National Park family to support and deliver on the nation's ambitious nature recovery targets and to achieve rapid action towards net zero in National Parks.

##### 4.2.2 Objectives

- All local authorities in in the SDNP to sign up to Race to Zero to ensure a common framework to work collectively towards net zero.
- All local authorities to manage their assets to work towards 33% of land managed for nature by 2030
- Ensure the three Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) covering the National Park are fit for purpose for the National Park.
- All local authorities to work in partnership with the SDNPA to deliver nature recovery through the planning system using all available mechanisms including biodiversity net gain.
- SDNP to develop a campaign to enable everyone to play their part in climate action.

#### 4.3 National Park for All

##### 4.3.1 Why this issue?

National Parks were created for everyone and are key to support the nation's health and wellbeing. We want the South Downs to be a welcoming and accessible place for all, where everyone can not only experience and enjoy the National Park, but can actively play a role in helping to care for its future. For many, huge barriers remain to accessing the National Park that go beyond physical accessibility barriers. The Glover Review found that "many communities in modern Britain feel that these landscapes hold no relevance for them." The SDNPA

##### 4.3.2 Objectives

- The SDNP, authorities, parishes and communities in the National Park to actively manage their greenspaces:
  - to improve access for all;

- to provide greater opportunity for connection to nature;
- for all to discover and enjoy the National Park.
- Authorities and parishes to ensure their urban green spaces link into the National Park to provide opportunities for nature recovery, access and health and wellbeing.
- All local authorities to use all mechanisms, including Community infrastructure Levy (CIL), to deliver better access and opportunities for connection with nature to all.
- The SDNPA to use its ReNature campaign to raise awareness of the need for nature recovery and to enable everyone to play their part.

## 5. Delivery – a shared responsibility

5.1 Delivering Public Affairs is a shared endeavour between staff, senior management and Members, who must all play their part in influencing at their respective levels in a targeted and planned manner. The objectives proposed for the revised Public Affairs Strategy are designed to enable everyone to play a role. For example, local authority and parish members can play a key role in influencing their relevant bodies in how they manage their greenspace.

## 6. Next steps

6.1 Once agreed, a set of key messages will be developed and we will produce a one-page briefing to enable all staff and Members to be able to actively engage in public affairs work with their authorities, bodies and contacts.

6.2 The specific impact of individual public affairs activities is notoriously difficult to measure as it can be, at times, impossible to attribute a change in behaviour, policy or practice to one particular activity. We have therefore chosen objectives where we can more clearly identify success. SMT will review the delivery of the Strategy on a regular basis.

## 7. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	Yes the Strategy will be taken to the October NPA for approval.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	The strategy will be delivered within existing resources.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Effective strategies ensure targeted use of the funds allocated for this work.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	This strategy delivers on all three key areas of the Corporate Plan – nature recovery, climate change and national park for all. It delivers on Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 of the PMP
Links to other projects or partner organisations	Communications & Engagement Strategy.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	The Public Affairs Strategy directly addresses our climate change objectives through its focus on delivering the nature and climate objectives.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	N/A

<b>Implication</b>	<b>Yes*/No</b>
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Strategy seeks to remove or minimise disadvantages experienced by certain groups in accessing and enjoying the National Park.</li> <li>By focusing on the accessibility and biodiversity of public greenspace, it encourages the use of such space by groups currently facing barriers in doing so.</li> </ul>
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	No
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	No
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	No
Are there any Data Protection implications?	No
Are there any Sustainability implications based on the 5 principles set out in the SDNPA Sustainability Strategy?	The strategy contributes to the delivery of principles 1, 2 and 5 of the Sustainability Strategy.

## **8. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision**

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
There is a risk that the Authority does not have mechanisms to identify and respond to emerging issues.	Low	Medium	The Public Affairs Strategy mitigates this risk.

**RUTH JAMES**

**Revised Public Affairs Strategy**

**South Downs National Park Authority**

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Appendices

1. Proposed Public Affairs Strategy 2022-24

2. Current Public Affairs Strategy agreed 2020

SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive; Director of Countryside Policy and Management; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services
External Consultees	None



# South Downs National Park Authority

# Public Affairs Strategy

# 2022-24

Review 2022 – to be agreed at October 2022 NPA





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# Introduction

The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) Public Affairs Strategy is designed to enable the Authority to make decisions about when and where we need to act to influence policy, practice or opinion on key issues in order to fulfill our statutory purposes and duty, and to protect the special qualities of the National Park.

This updated Public Affairs Strategy (2022-24) has three key purposes:

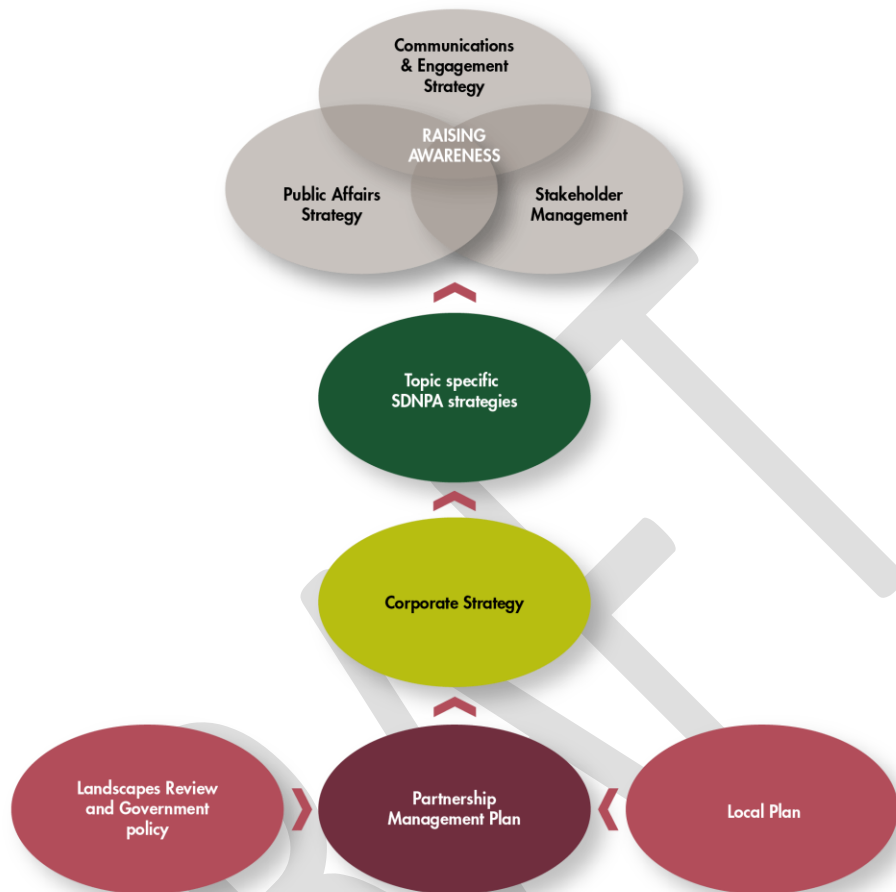
- to ensure a coordinated and targeted approach to our public affairs work to enable the Authority to influence policy and decision making on agreed strategic issues affecting the National Park;
- to identify the key public affairs issues that we will proactively work on over the next two years; and
- to set out guiding principles for how we can effectively and quickly deal with emerging issues so that the Authority can respond to challenges and be ready to grasp opportunities.

It is **one** of, but by no means the only, key way by which we can achieve the large-scale objectives of the *Partnership Management Plan*, the *Local Plan* and the *Corporate Plan* that sit outside of our direct control.

This Strategy has clear links to a number of key strategic organisational documents and strategies (see Figure 1 below). It does not duplicate the objectives set out in any of them.

The Strategy is for 2022-24 and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis by SMT to ensure that emerging issues and a changing external policy environment are adequately reflected.

**Figure 1: Context of the Public Affairs Strategy**



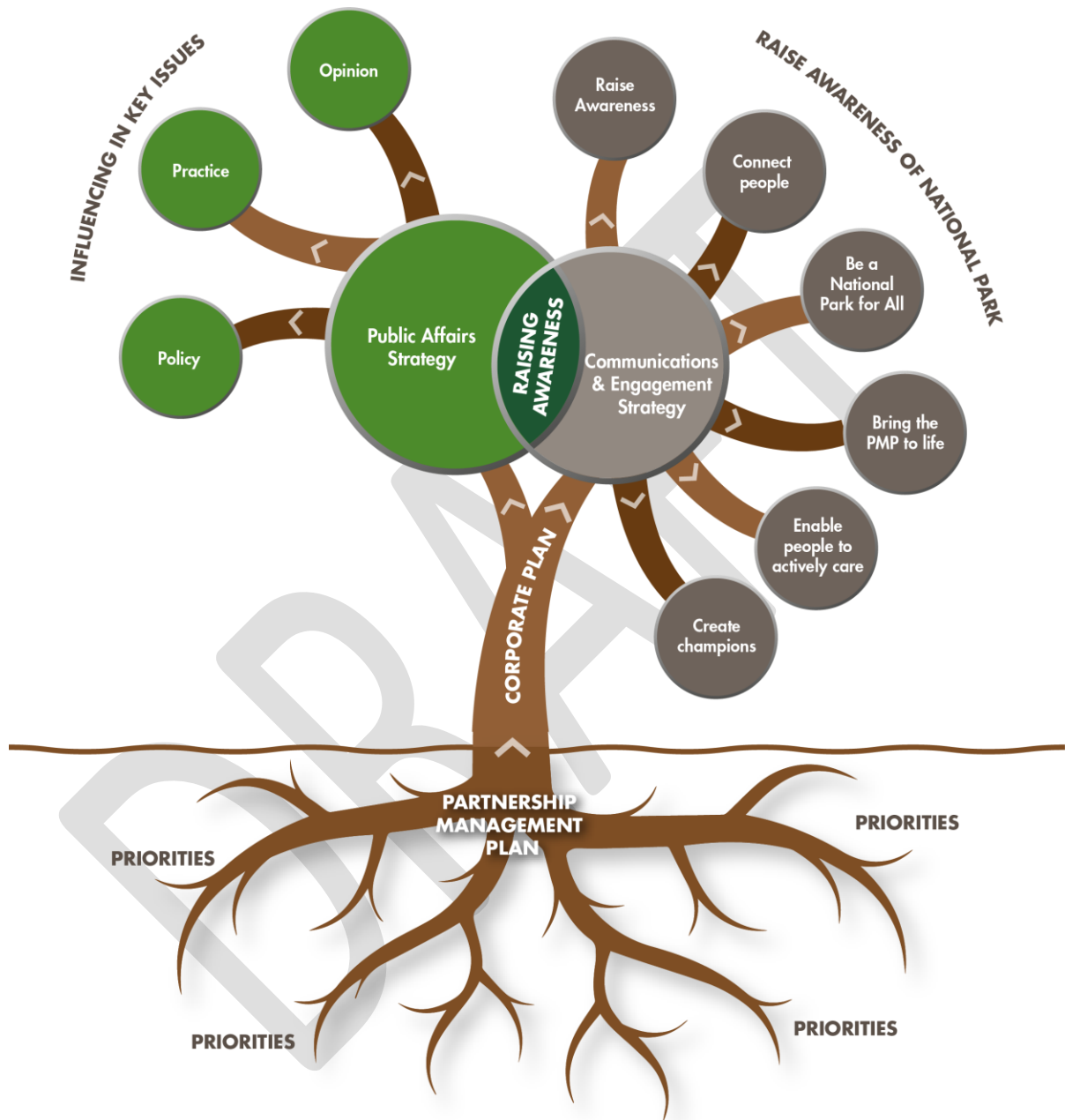
## How our communications and engagement, and public affairs works together

Public affairs is only one aspect of our wider communications and engagement work. The Public Affairs Strategy sits alongside the Communications & Engagement Strategy but unlike the Communications & Engagement Strategy it:

- does not cover the day-to-day detailed communications about the projects and wider work of the National Park and our partners;
- it is not about ongoing communication with stakeholders which is covered elsewhere; and
- it is also not the sole expression of our corporate or budget priorities.

See Figure 2 below:

**Figure 2: Public Affairs Strategy and Communications & Engagement**



# Guiding principles

This strategy sets out the strategic issues that our public affairs work will focus on in the coming two years. To choose which issues to prioritise for our public affairs work, we have used the guiding principles set out below. These guiding principles will also be used to decide on whether any emergency or urgent issues should be of high priority.

We prioritise issues:

- that play a major role in the delivery of the Purposes for which the National Park has been designated and the duty of the Authority;
- that deliver on our Corporate Plan priorities;
- where the special qualities of the South Downs are at risk;
- that directly relate to the priorities set out in the Government's plans for National Parks, including the issues raised in the Landscape Review;
- that are likely to generate significant interest and concern among the communities of the National Park; and
- that are likely to generate significant media interest; and

**We will then vet each of these issues against three crucial tests:**

- where we have a clear leadership role to play;
- where there is genuine ability for us to influence; and
- where the issue is time critical – ie, when there is a specific policy debate/practical development that means the window of opportunity to influence is now.

# Key issues and objectives

The Partnership Management Plan sets out the key outcomes for the National Park over the next five years while our Corporate Plan sets out the priorities for the National Park Authority until 2025. Our Communications & Engagement Strategy is set out to support delivery of the Partnership Management Plan and covers all of the key outcomes, as well as our Local Plan and Corporate Plan. This Public Affairs Strategy focuses on the key issues that can best be influenced by public affairs work – **ie where we can influence policy, practice or opinion**. The issues included are no reflection of the relative importance of these issues over other issues in the Partnership Management Plan or Corporate Plan.

To ensure adequate focus and resources, a small and targeted number of key issues have been chosen to focus our public affairs work on. The following issues represent the key challenges and opportunities facing the National Park.

Our public affairs work to influence policy, practice and opinion on our chosen issues below, will continue at a high level individually through direct liaison in policy development fora and as part of the wider NPE and NPUK family. At a regional and local level we will ensure that we develop and create relationships at all levels to enable delivery of our public affairs objectives.

The strategy will be reviewed and its delivery overseen by the Senior Management Team to ensure that emerging issues and a changing external policy environment are adequately reflected.

## **NATURE AND CLIMATE**

Nature is increasingly under pressure, and we urgently need to reverse its decline. At present, just 25% of the National Park is managed for nature, and the National Park Authority has therefore adopted an ambitious target to increase this to 33% by renaturing 13,000 hectares of land by 2030. Nature also holds the key to successfully responding to climate change. Biodiversity loss and climate change do not recognise administrative boundaries. A regional response to biodiversity loss and climate change is needed if we are to ensure nature everywhere, for everyone, and to provide nature-based solutions to climate changes that the National Park and the wider South East is already experiencing.

Despite nature recovery and climate finally reaching top level priority in Government planning over the last year or two as we headed towards COP26, the cost of living crisis has seen priorities change and commitments to both nature recovery and climate change begin to waver.

Nature-based solutions provide the basis of the National Park Authority's response to climate change. We want the National Park to sit at the heart of nature recovery and climate action in the region.

National Parks also sit at the heart of the nation's nature recovery network and climate vision and we will work as part of the wider National Park family to support and deliver on the nation's ambitious nature recovery targets and to achieve rapid action towards net zero in National Parks.

### **WHY THIS ISSUE?**

#### **Key role to play:**

Purpose 1 of National Parks is to Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area. Biodiversity loss and climate change are inextricably linked and hold the key to the future of the National Park.

#### **Our Ability to influence:**

We have an ability to influence at local, regional and national level:

- As part of the protected landscapes family, which forms a key element of the Government's NRN Strategy. At a local and regional level we have the partner relationships to bring key stakeholders from across the region to work together towards nature recovery.
- As part of the National Park family we have committed to work together, at scale, to achieve rapid action towards net zero in National Parks through Race to Zero. We are well placed to influence the adoption of Race to Zero as a common framework for National Parks and local authorities.

**Time critical:** Nature is in trouble and action is needed fast if the Government is to meet its NRN target to restore 75% of protected sites to favourable condition and to achieve 30 by 2030 so that nature can thrive.

- The Local Nature Recovery Strategy guidance is currently being developed.
- There are strong calls for a consistent measure and framework for climate action – now is the time to push for shared commitment to using Race to Zero as a common framework.

#### **OUR OBJECTIVES:**

- All local authorities in in the SDNP to sign up to Race to Zero to ensure a common framework to work collectively towards net zero.

- All local authorities to manage their assets to work towards 33% of land managed for nature by 2030
- Ensure the three Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) covering the National Park are fit for purpose for the National Park.
- All local authorities to work in partnership with the SDNPA to deliver nature recovery through the planning system using all available mechanisms including biodiversity net gain.
- SDNP to develop a campaign to enable everyone to play their part in climate action.

**Barriers:**

- Lack of clarity about what the LNRS guidance will contain.
- Lack of a shared framework and consistent measuring, planning and delivery.
- Heavy planning pressures especially on the coastal plain.

**NATIONAL PARK FOR ALL**

**What is the issue?**

National Parks were created for everyone and are key to support the nation’s health and wellbeing. We want the South Downs to be a welcoming and accessible place for all, where everyone can not only experience and enjoy the National Park, but can actively play a role in helping to care for its future.

For many, huge barriers remain to accessing the National Park that go beyond physical accessibility barriers. The Glover Review found that “many communities in modern Britain feel that these landscapes hold no relevance for them.”

As part of National Parks England we have committed to work towards the following collective goal, “Everyone should be able to discover and engage with protected landscapes to benefit the health and wellbeing of the whole nation”.

**WHY THIS ISSUE?**

**Key role to play:**

Purpose 2 of National Parks is to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public. The SDNPA has created strong networks across learning, youth action, access, health and wellbeing, volunteering and cultural heritage.

**Our Ability to influence:**

The SDNPA is well placed to influence at local/regional and national level as part of NPE and the wider NPUK family.

**Time critical:**

Covid has had a big impact on many of our most underserved communities including young people and those with health and wellbeing issues. The pandemic has, however, created a unique moment where many people have experienced a first time connection with nature by visiting the South Downs. We need to jump on this opportunity to help connect our underserved communities with the benefit of their National Park and nature.

**OUR OBJECTIVES:**

- The SDNP, authorities, parishes and communities in the National Park to actively manage their greenspaces:
  - to improve access for all;



- to provide greater opportunity for connection to nature;
- for all to discover and enjoy the National Park.

- Authorities and parishes to ensure their urban green spaces link into the National Park to provide opportunities for nature recovery, access and health and wellbeing.
- All local authorities to use all mechanisms, including Community infrastructure Levy (CIL), to deliver better access and opportunities for connection with nature to all.
- The SDNPA to use its ReNature campaign to raise awareness of the need for nature recovery and to enable everyone to play their part.

**Barriers:**

- Lack of awareness of what the National Park is and what it has to offer.
- Access or financial issues
- Lack of employment opportunities, work-related learning, volunteering roles and awareness of what the SDNP can offer
- Social, cultural and economic divisions that have left some feeling that National Parks are not spaces in which they can find welcome or belonging. This includes a lack of representation of the breadth of society.

## How we will deliver

Our greatest strength as an Authority is the knowledge and passion of our people. This Public Affairs Strategy will only be achieved through the coordinated and joint efforts of officers and members. SMT will oversee delivery on an annual delivery plan for our public affairs work.

## Key stakeholders

The SDNPA cannot create change on key issues for the National Park on its own. The PMP brings together the key stakeholders to identify the objectives that we collectively want to achieve and makes a commitment to working in partnership through a shared delivery plan.

Every kind of stakeholder needs coordinated relationship management and communication, ranging from an occasional 'light touch' to detailed, frequent updates.

The SDNPA manages its relationships with key stakeholders in two ways:

- on an ongoing basis; and
- on specific issues at specific times.

This stakeholder management is led by relevant strategy leads, Heads of Team, SMT and Members.

Successful engagement on specific issues relies on relationships built up with the stakeholder on an ongoing basis. Keeping the right people informed at the right time, with the right amount of detail is critical to making stakeholders feel valued, involved, and heard and to ensuring that when important issues arise, relationships management is ongoing and a level of communication is already in place.

Identifying the key stakeholders for each issue has been done by applying four criteria:

1. **Contribution (value):** Does the stakeholder have information expertise on the issue that could be helpful?
2. **Influence:** How much influence does the stakeholder have and who with?
3. **Willingness to engage:** How willing is the stakeholder to engage?
4. **Necessity of involvement:** Is this someone who could derail or delegitimise the process if they were not included in the engagement?

**Channels:** We have many communications and engagement channels that we can use in pursuit of our public affairs objectives. We will look at the best channels to use to connect with/influence them. It is most likely that we will use a combination of different channels for each stakeholder. Our communication channels include, among others:

- Leadership channels:
  - High-level meetings with Defra and other Government departments and bodies
  - High-level meetings between leaders/chairs
  - Member interactions with their own bodies, local authorities, parishes etc
  - Director level meetings with partners
- Strategic groups:
  - South Downs Partnership
  - Local Nature Partnerships
  - Land Managers Groups
  - LEPs etc
- Digital: website, social media etc
- Printed publications
- Events: Both in person and virtual.
- Media: Proactive and reactive media in print, radio and TV
- Peer-to-peer channels:
  - Meetings at officer level
  - Interactions between officers and volunteers and public etc

## Conclusion and next steps

This Public Affairs Strategy is designed to enable us to carry out coordinated public affairs work on some of the key issues facing the National Park. It sits alongside the wider Communications & Engagement Strategy. The issues chosen are in no way a reflection that other areas are of lesser priority, rather, they are the key issues through which we know our public affairs work can have the most impact. They also align with our commitments to work as part of National Parks England to deliver on collective national goals.

By focusing on a clear and defined set of objectives, we are ensuring that we will use our finite resources to best effect. An annual delivery plan will be developed and overseen by SMT. A short guide with key objectives and messages will be developed for use by Members, SMT and all officers to support the effective delivery of our public affairs objectives for 2022-24.

South Downs National Park Authority  
**Public Affairs Strategy 2021-  
23**

Approved at NPA December 2020



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# Introduction

The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) must make decisions about when and where we need to act in order to fulfill our statutory purposes and duty, and to protect the special qualities of the National Park. One key way in which we do this is through public affairs.

**Public affairs can be defined as seeking to influence policy, practice or opinion through stakeholder management.**

The Public Affairs Strategy for the SDNPA has three key purposes:

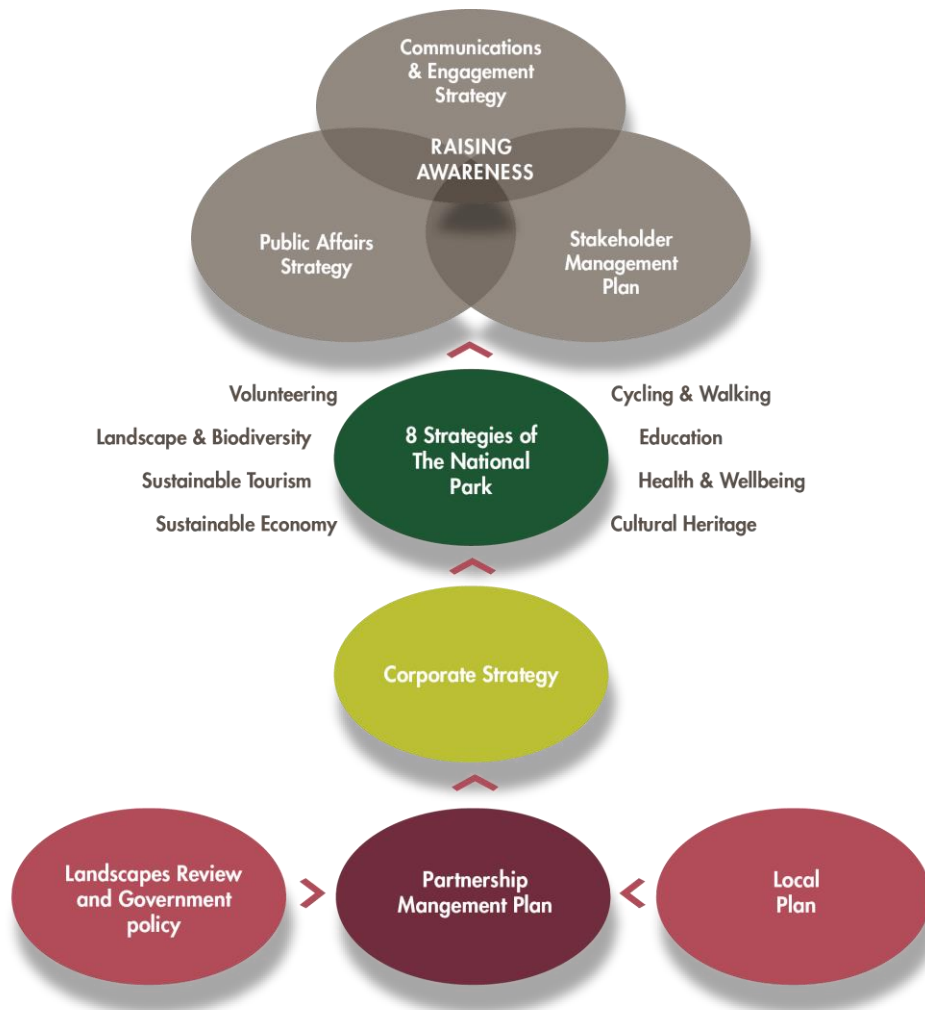
- To ensure a coordinated approach to our public affairs work to enable the Authority to influence policy and decision making on agreed strategic issues affecting the National Park.
- To identify the top three public affairs issues that we will proactively work on over the next two years.
- To set out guiding principles for how we can effectively and quickly deal with emerging issues so that the Authority can respond to challenges and be ready to grasp opportunities.

It is **one** of, but by no means the only, key way by which we can achieve the large-scale objectives of the *Partnership Management Plan*, the *Local Plan* and the *Corporate Plan* that sit outside of our direct control.

This Strategy has clear links to a number of key strategic organisational documents and strategies (see Figure 2 below). It does not duplicate the objectives set out in any of them.

The Strategy is for 2021-23 and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis by SMT to ensure that emerging issues and a changing external policy environment are adequately reflected.

**Figure 1: Context of the Public Affairs Strategy**



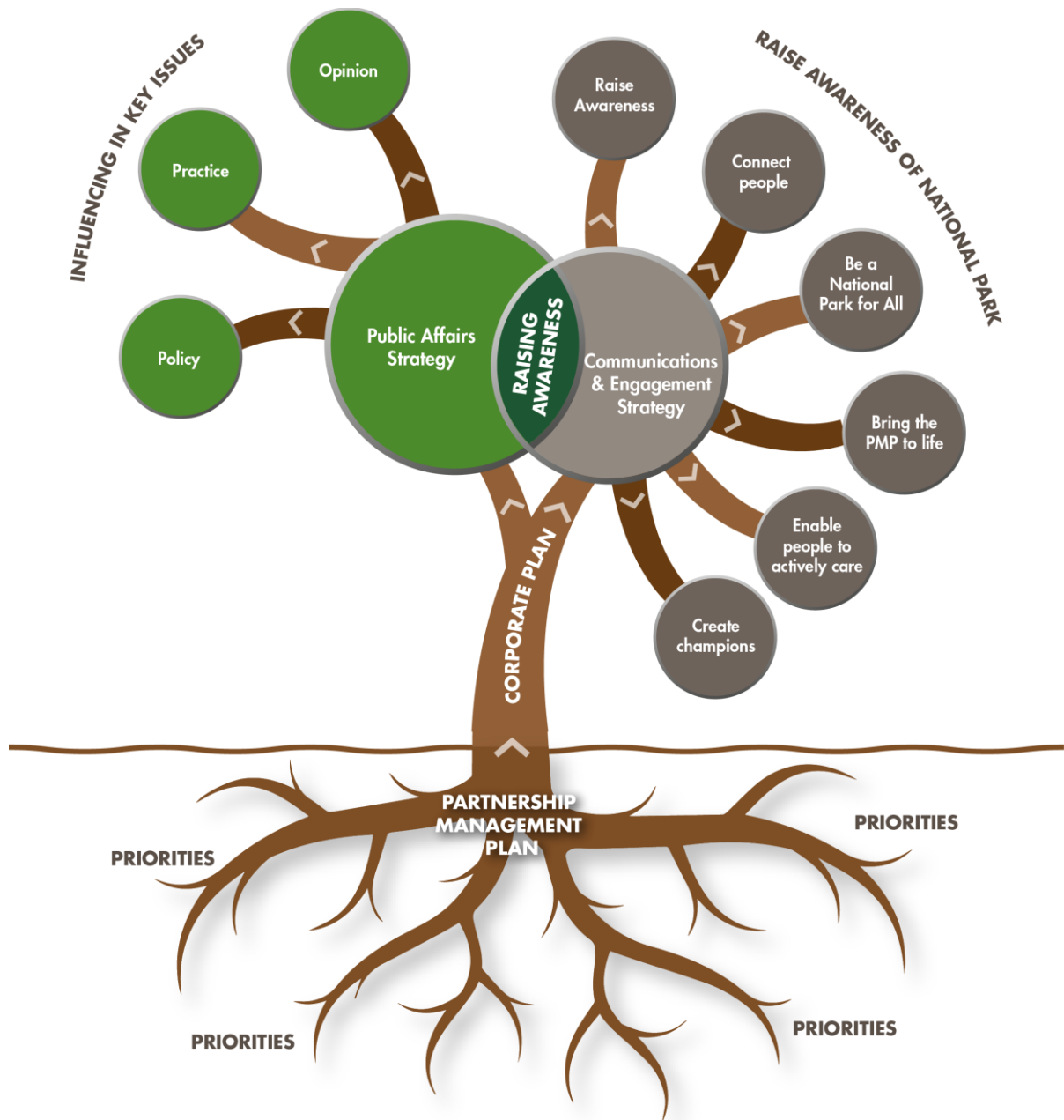
## How our communications and public affairs will work together

Public affairs is only one aspect of our communications and engagement work. The Public Affairs Strategy sits alongside the Communications & Engagement Strategy but unlike the Communications & Engagement Strategy it:

- does not cover the day-to-day detailed communications about the projects and wider work of the National Park and our partners;
- it is not about ongoing communication with stakeholders – this is covered in the Stakeholder Management Plan in Appendix I; and
- it is also not the sole expression of our corporate or budget priorities.

See Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Public Affairs Strategy and Communications & Engagement



## Guiding principles

This strategy sets out the strategic issues that our public affairs work will focus on in the coming two years. To choose which issues to prioritise for our public affairs work, we have used the guiding principles set out below. These guiding principles will also be used to decide on whether any emergency or urgent issues should be of high priority.

We prioritise issues:

- that play a major role in the delivery of the Purposes for which the National Park has been designated and the duty of the Authority
- where the special qualities of the South Downs are at risk
- that directly relate to the priorities set out in the Government’s plans for National Parks, including the issues raised in the Landscape Review.
- that are likely to generate significant interest and concern among the communities of the National Park
- that are likely to generate significant media interest; and

**We will then vet each of these issues against three crucial tests:**

- where we have a clear leadership role to play;
- where there is genuine ability for us to influence; and
- where the issue is time critical – ie, when there is a specific policy debate/practical development that means the window of opportunity to influence is now.

## Key issues and objectives

The Partnership Management Plan sets out out 10 key outcomes for the National Park over the next five years. Our Communications & Engagement Strategy is set out to support delivery of the Partnership Management Plan and covers all of the 10 key outcomes, as well as our Local Plan and Corporate Plan. This public affairs strategy focuses on the key issues that can best be influenced by public affairs work – **ie where we can influence policy, practice or opinion**. The issues included are no reflection of the relative importance of these issues over other issues in the Partnership Management Plan.

To ensure adequate focus and resources, three key issues are chosen to focus our public affairs work on. The strategy will be reviewed by the Senior Management Team to ensure that emerging issues and a changing external policy environment are adequately reflected.



## THE FUTURE OF FARMING

### What is the issue?

More than 75 per cent of the National Park is farmed and over two-thirds is currently managed through some form of agri-environment scheme.

A post-Brexit future without the European Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) represents the biggest change to how we think about farming in decades. Much detail of the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMs) remains undecided and uncertain.

### WHY THIS ISSUE?

**Key role to play:** The future of farming is the future of the National Park's landscapes and now is exactly the right time to ensure that is shaped in a way that supports our Vision for 2050. The National Park has submitted two successful test and trials – one on farmer workshops and one on farm cluster Land App, and is ideally placed to test approaches for lowland landscapes.

**Our Ability to influence:** The SDNPA is well placed to develop further pilots that will influence post-Brexit plans that will shape the future of the National Park for many decades to come. Such pilots will have great relevance for other lowland landscapes.

**Time critical:** Many post-Brexit decisions remain to be taken that will shape the future of land and environmental management in the UK.

### OUR OBJECTIVES:

- To ensure that any new scheme(s) gives the same or better support to the environment as current schemes, and are expanded to include cultural heritage, access and education.
- Farm clusters within the National Park to become innovative test beds for potential agri-environment schemes in lowland landscapes.

**Barriers:** Lots of competing priorities for government mean that the current level of funding for agriculture, environment and rural development may not be maintained.

### What do we want?

- To support sustainable and profitable farming that does not conflict with our purposes.
- To increase biodiversity in the National Park through maximising delivery of current agri-environment schemes.
- To work with farm clusters in the National Park to increase knowledge and share learning.
- To continue to pilot new land management schemes in lowland landscapes including biodiversity, access and cultural heritage.

### Why?

- Farming is an integral and important part of the South Downs landscape
- Sustainable, profitable farming can deliver environmental outcomes.
- We want to enhance the benefits of current Agri-environment schemes that cover approximately 60% of the National Park.
- Farmers in the South Downs want to work together – 70% of the National Park is now covered by the South Downs Farm Cluster Network and the benefits of collaborative working have been demonstrated.
- The Farm Cluster Network means we are ready and able to pilot any new schemes now.
- Estates and farms, through Whole Estate Plans, enable farmers and others involved in landscape management to build on their assets.

## **ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH NATURE**

### **What is the issue?**

No other group has been so affected by Covid-19 as young people, and there is a real opportunity to engage a whole generation with nature and the National Park, with South Downs Youth Action providing the perfect vehicle to engage and seek commitment from key stakeholders.

- There is a growing disconnect between young people and nature
- Young people (16-24) are under-represented in the SDNP visitor profile
- There are few volunteers under 25 across the SDNP – nearly half of all organisations in the SDNP Volunteer Network have no volunteers in this age group
- If we are to secure the future of the National Park we must support young people to learn about and care for nature, so that we are enabling the next generation of conservationists
- 4% of SDVRS are aged 16-24; Across the Volunteer Network, 48% of all organisations have no volunteers aged 16-25 (SD Volunteer Network Survey 2019).

### **WHY THIS ISSUE?**

**Key role to play:** The SDNP Learning and Volunteering Networks are well established and well respected and South Downs Youth Action is becoming established as a brand for engaging young people across the SDNP. We have funding secured to both fund the South Downs Youth Action and to launch the #iwillfornature grants in the new year.

**Our Ability to influence:** The SDNPA is well placed to extend the successful pilot on South Downs Youth Action to influence the adoption of this approach across these networks

**Time critical:** Covid has had a disproportionate impact on young people and youth mental health has declined significantly. Enforced restrictions on accessing the SDNP have exacerbated the disconnect between many young people and the SDNP.

### **OUR OBJECTIVE:**

Opportunities for young people to engage with the National Park

- Partner organisations to sign up to South Downs Youth Action:
  - provide opportunities for young people to engage with nature;
  - create youth volunteer or apprenticeship roles; and
  - provide opportunities for youth voices in their Governance
- Further education sector to sign up to South Downs Youth Action and commit to sharing information and guiding young people towards the three Youth Action opportunities.

**Barriers:** Lack of employment opportunities, work-related learning, volunteering roles and awareness of what the SDNP can offer

### **What do we want?**

Young people will have greater opportunities to engage with nature and the National Park

### **Why?**

- The Glover report calls on National landscapes to “...develop ambitious targeted plans for helping those who currently fail to benefit from our most special places”. It also expects National Landscapes to produce as part of their management plans “... ambitious strategies to increase the diversity of access for marginalised groups”.
- The 25-year Environment Strategy has targets to: Encourage children to be close to nature, in and out of school, with particular focus on disadvantaged areas. This includes making it easier “for schools and Pupil Referral Units to take pupils on trips to natural

spaces on a regular basis where they can combine learning with feeling healthier and happier.

- In 2018 the Europarc Federation launched the Europarc Youth Manifesto which “is a source of ideas and inspiration for decision-makers in Protected Areas and rural communities to ensure the involvement and empowerment of young people”.
- Young people have emerged at the forefront of the global conservation and climate action movements. If we are to enable the next generation of conservationists in the South Downs, we must invest in connecting young people to nature and engage with the National Park.

## NATURE RECOVERY

### What is the issue?

Nature is increasingly under pressure, and we urgently need to reverse the decline in nature and give it a chance to recover. Nature also holds the key to successfully responding to climate change.

### WHY THIS ISSUE?

**Key role to play:** Purpose 1 of National Parks is to Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.

We are in an ideal position to bring partners together to help deliver the ambitious regional People and Nature Network (PANN) which aims to create a connected network of “green infrastructure” across the South East that makes havens for wildlife, supports local economies, helps to mitigate climate change and gives local people all the health and well-being benefits of a better natural environment.

Nature-based solutions provide the basis of the National Park Authority’s response to climate change. Climate Minister Lord Goldsmith has this week said that " nature-based solutions are being utterly neglected in the global climate agenda and wrongly so."

**Our Ability to influence:** We have a strong ability to influence at national level as part of the protected landscapes family, which forms a key element of the Government’s NRN Strategy. At a local and regional level we have the partner relationships to bring key stakeholders from across the region to work together towards nature recovery.

**Time critical:** Nature is in trouble and action is needed fast if the Government is to meet its NRN target to restore 75% of protected sites to favourable condition so that nature can thrive.

### OUR OBJECTIVE:

- Local authorities in and around the National Park to:
  - (alongside other key partners) sign up to the South Downs People and Nature Network (PANN);
  - commit to enhance their public open space for the benefit of nature and access/people using the PANN evidence to target the areas that offer the greatest benefits;
  - work with the National Park to develop and implement county-based Local Nature Recovery Strategy(ies);
  - “call for sites” for biodiversity net gain to be included in the county-based Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

- Defra to define a single carbon metric for all habitat types.

**Barriers:** Planning pressures in the area and a lack of active engagement with nature recovery from some local authorities.

**What do we want?**

Our People and Nature Network bringing partners together and sitting at the heart of successful nature recovery in the South East.

**Why?**

Nature and the issues facing it do not recognise administrative boundaries. A regional response to nature loss is needed if we are to restore nature for the benefit of biodiversity and people, and to provide nature-based solution to climate changes that the National Park and the wider South East is already experiencing.

## How we will deliver

Our greatest strength as an Authority is the knowledge and passion of our people. This Public Affairs Strategy will only be achieved through the coordinated and joint efforts of officers and members.

The strategy goes on to set out how we will work with key stakeholders on our objectives, and we will develop an annual delivery plan that will set out the officers and Members that will be mobilised to achieve the prioritised objectives.

## Key stakeholders

The SDNPA cannot create change on key issues for the National Park on its own. The PMP brings together the key stakeholders to identify the objectives that we collectively want to achieve and makes a commitment to working in partnership through a shared delivery plan.

Every kind of stakeholder needs coordinated relationship management and communication, ranging from an occasional 'light touch' to detailed, frequent updates.

Our public affairs work relies on our ability to effectively manage our relationships with key stakeholders in two ways:

- on an ongoing basis; and
- on specific issues at specific times.

Successful engagement on specific issues relies on relationships built up with the stakeholder on an ongoing basis. Keeping the right people informed at the right time, with the right amount of detail is critical to making stakeholders feel valued, involved, and heard and to ensuring that when important issues arise, relationships management is ongoing and a level of communication is already in place.

### Ongoing stakeholder management:

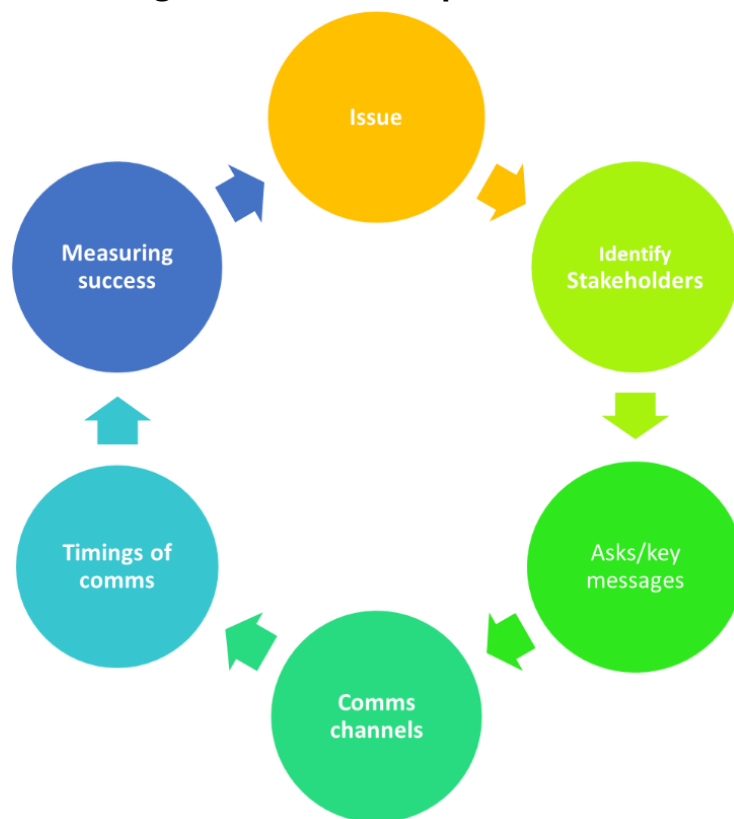
Working with stakeholders on specific issues must sit on a foundation of ongoing Stakeholder Management that identifies key stakeholders and sets out how we will engage effectively with them

throughout the lifecycle of the Partnership Management Plan in order to achieve its key outcomes. See Appendix I for more detail.

### Stakeholder management on specific issues:

This strategy goes on to propose a number of priority issues for the National Park over the next two years and the specific objectives and asks we want to achieve during that period. For these and future specific issues we will identify the issue, our ‘asks’, the key relevant stakeholders, how we will communicate with them and how we will measure success.

**Figure 3: Process for public affairs**



Identifying the key stakeholders for each issue will be done by applying four criteria:

1. **Contribution (value):** Does the stakeholder have information expertise on the issue that could be helpful?
2. **Influence:** How much influence does the stakeholder have and who with?
3. **Willingness to engage:** How willing is the stakeholder to engage?
4. **Necessity of involvement:** Is this someone who could derail or delegitimise the process if they were not included in the engagement?

**Channels:** We have many communications and engagement channels that we can use in pursuit of our public affairs objectives. Once key stakeholders have been identified we will look at the best channels to use to connect with/influence them. It is most likely that we will use a combination of different channels for each stakeholder. Our communication channels include, among others:

- Digital: website, social media etc
- Printed publications
- Events: Both in person and virtual.
- Media: Proactive and reactive media in print, radio and TV

- Leadership channels:
  - High-level meetings between leaders/chairs
  - Member interactions with their own bodies, local authorities, parishes etc
  - Director level meetings with partners
- Peer-to-peer channels:
  - Meetings at officer level
  - Interactions between officers and volunteers and public etc
- Strategic groups:
  - South Downs Partnership
  - Land Managers Groups
  - LEPs etc

## Conclusion

This Public Affairs Strategy is designed to enable us to carry out coordinated public affairs work on some of the key issues facing the National Park. It sits alongside the wider Communications & Engagement Strategy. The issues chosen are in no way a reflection that other areas are of lesser priority, rather, they are the three issues through which we know our public affairs work can have the most impact. By focusing on three issues we are ensuring that we will use our finite resources to best effect.