

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 17 FEBRUARY 2022

Held at the Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre, Midhurst at 10.30am

Present: Annie Brown, Tim Burr, Angus Dunn, Melanie Hunt (Chair), Doug Jones, Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Michael Lunn, Martin Osborne, Henry Potter, Isabel Thurston and Stephen Whale.

Independent (CIPFA) Co-opted Members of the Committee: Carole Nicholson

Co-opted Members of the Committee: Morris Findley and Lawrence Leather

SDNPA Officers: Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive) Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Tim Slaney (Director of Planning), Louise Read (Monitoring Officer), Nigel Manvell (Chief Finance Officer), Alan Brough (Head of Business Services), Robin Parr (Head of Governance) and Catherine Sydenham (Committee Officer).

Also Attended by: Anne Rehill (Performance and Project Manager), Tanya Hibberd (Performance and Research Lead) Chris Fairbrother (Landscape and Biodiversity Lead –Chalk), Colin Carre (Heathlands Reunited Project Manager), Andy Conlan (external Auditor), Mark Winton (Chief Internal Auditor) and Alister Linton-Crook (Cycling Project Officer).

OPENING REMARKS

155. The Chair opened the meeting

156. The Chair welcomed all those present and stated that:

- The meeting was being webcast by the Authority and would be available for subsequent on-line viewing. Anyone entering the meeting was considered to have given consent to be filmed or recorded, and for the possible use of images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purpose
- SDNPA Members had a primary responsibility for ensuring that the Authority furthers the National Park Purposes and Duty. Members regarded themselves first and foremost as Members of the Authority, and would act in the best interests of the National Park as a whole, rather than as representatives of their appointing body or any interest groups.

157. Within the opening remarks: the Chair:

- The Chair referred to it being Alan Brough (Head of Business Services) last Committee before retirement. On behalf of all members the Chair thanked Alan for all his work during the past 10 years at SDNPA.

ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

158. Apologies were received from Peter Diplock and Tom Fourcade.

ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

159. Stephen Whale declared a Prejudicial Interest in Agenda Item 19, as a Director of South Downs Commercial Operations Limited and was not present for this item.

160. Martin Osborne declared a public services interest in Agenda Item 13, 14, 16 & 17 as a Member of Brighton and Hove City Council and the Chair of the Aquifer Partnership.

ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 25th NOVEMBER 2021

161. The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 25th November 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

162. The following updates were given to the Committee:

- With reference to Minute 131, The Chair updated the Committee that the Risk Register Briefing session had taken place.

- With reference to Minute 119, The Director of Countryside Policy and Management updated the Committee that the Whole Estate Plan (WEP) guidance had been updated, incorporating the comments made at Committee and would be available on the website.
- With reference to Minute 123, the Head of Business Services updated the Committee that the HR team were working on the most meaningful way to present the HR trend data.
- With reference to Minute 138, the Head of Governance & Support Services updated the Committee that the Committee Chair would join the Legal Services and Monitoring Officer Contract Panel.
- With reference to Minute 145, the Head of Governance & Support Services updated the Committee that the Operating Agreement between SDNPA and South Downs Commercial Operations Ltd had been agreed at NPA in December 2021 and the board of Directors had appointed an additional independent Director to join the Board of Directors.

163. In response to questions Officers confirmed that:

- SDNPA currently did a great deal of work with colleges and Universities across the whole of the National Park which included the grazing project at the Seven Sisters Country Park with Plumpton College amongst others.
- The Operating Agreement between the SDNPA and South Downs Commercial Operations Ltd would indemnify the Company directors for all liabilities that they incur in respect of their delivery of the landscape management plan.

ITEM 5: URGENT MATTERS

164. There were none

ITEM 6: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

165. There were no Members of the public who had requested to speak.

ITEM 7: NEED FOR PART II EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

166. Officers advised that there was no requirement to consider any item in private session.

ITEM 8: DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2020-25 YEAR 3 ACTION PLAN FOR 2022/23

167. The Director of Countryside Policy and Management introduced report PR21/22-29 and reminded members of the report content, the Performance and Research Lead also helped to answer questions.

168. The Committee commented that:

- They expressed their thanks to all staff for the hard work that had gone on behind the scenes to produce the draft Corporate Plan.
- Within the Climate Change actions, it should be clear about what we can achieve against what we aspire to. A number of other pollutants, other than carbon, affected Climate Change.
- The National Park for All was difficult to measure in a meaningful way, should focus on more than just diversity of volunteering and include metrics that can be reported on in a tangible way.
- The ladder of stewardship could be a potential way to measure direct engagement impact.
- Wording around the provision of publicity around the Pre-Application advice service needed to be amended to reflect it was referring to withdrawing the publicity of pre Applications and not the service.
- Should further targets be added for Climate Change and Nature recovery work?

- The creation of community resource hubs should be multi-use and not just health and well-being hubs.
- The column entitled '*In Year 3 of our Corporate Plan we will:*' should contain measurable targets and be further sharpened and crosschecked with other priorities. The budget should dovetail the Corporate Plan so it was clear where the investment was.

169. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- The Farmer Panel was different to the farm Clusters as the Farmer Panel delivers the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (FiPL).
- Although the Rural Economy was not a high-level target for SDNPA, it was a fundamental driver for huge amount of work as well as delivering on the Statutory Purposes and Duty of the National Park.
- Work was happening to identify areas where there could be a high strategic impact for little resource.
- Further clarity and commentary would be added around the Measures for Success and ensuring that double counting did not happen between the different priorities. The Measures for Success were originally agreed at the beginning of the Corporate Plan cycle and although priorities had changed since they were originally agreed they would continue to be measured and officers would further look at whether they could be further intervened.
- The 'Call for Sites' as part of the 'Nature Recovery Campaign' had now closed and Officers were now looking at all proposed sites and had received proposals from some Local Authorities.
- SDNPA already did a great deal of work with Universities and Colleges and there was a longer term plan to further increase this.
- There was a 10 year Landscape Management Plan for the Seven Sisters Country Park with the aim of it becoming an exemplar site that was properly monitored. Some of the worst areas were being targeted with Ponies and there was also cattle grazing the site using an electronic tag system with sheep being introduced in the spring. There had been extensive recent media coverage regarding the return of the short ear owls to the site and opportunities for carbon sequestration with both wetland and kelp on the sea bed.
- Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP) were part of the Local Plan and any review of the NDP's would come after the review of the Local Plan. The wording and reference to 'Major Development' would be further defined to identify whether it was referring to 10 or more dwellings or to Major Development in the National Park.
- Enforcement was not a statutory function.
- The reference to 'Work on the Duty to Cooperate in line with our Section 62 duty' referred to Section 62 of the Environment Act and would be further clarified.

170. The Director of Countryside and Policy Management clarified that the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) mission statement referred to in the draft Corporate Plan had been adopted by Officers and a report on EDI would be presented to a future NPA meeting.

171. It was proposed, seconded and agreed to amend Recommendation 2 to, add in the following to the end of the Recommendation '*subject to amendments to reflect the committee's comments regarding measuring the impact of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion work, additional clarification in relation to projects in the measures of success table, defining major planning applications, inclusion of additional legal references, refining of the year 3 measures and the completion of the small number of targets currently missing*'.

172. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

- 1) Receive the draft Corporate Plan 2020-25 year 3 action plan for 2022/23
- 2) Recommend approval of the draft Corporate Plan 2020-25 year 3 action plan to the National Park Authority (NPA) in March 2022, subject to amendments to reflect the committee's comments regarding measuring the impact of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion work, additional clarification in relation to projects in the measures of success table, defining major planning applications, inclusion of additional legal references, refining of the year 3 measures and the completion of the small number of targets currently missing.

ITEM 9: PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN DELIVERY – CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN – UPDATE REPORT

173. The Landscape and Biodiversity Lead (Chalk) introduced report PR21/22-30 and reminded members of the report content including that there was a balance to be struck between land being used for carbon sinks, priority habitats and livestock grazing for food production. The carbon baseline included all gases under the heading of greenhouse gases.

174. The Committee commented that:

- Could the carbon base line assessment undertaken by Small World Consultants be used as press coverage to inform residents that the average resident in the SDNP has a higher carbon footprint than the average person outside of the SDNP boundary?
- Thought needs to be given as to how we shift from conversation around Climate Change to how we actually begin to make changes. The targets set by the SDNPA were aspirational but challenging to achieve and meaningful practical steps for residents needed to be created.
- The SDNP has 180 parishes. Those Parishes who have good case studies or projects could all help encourage other Parishes to start the journey, sharing best practice and providing advice.
- Could carbon literacy training be provided to Local Authority members who could then in turn share their knowledge with the other members of their Local Authorities?
- The monitoring of carbon credits should be calculated accurately to ensure that there was no double counting making the picture look better than it actually was.

175. In response to questions Officers clarified that:

- A diversity of land use was important and this should include areas to be left untouched but also other areas managed for food production and biodiversity amongst others.
- There was currently on going work to look at tree succession planning and which species might be resistant to climate change.
- As part of a WEP an eco-systems assessment was undertaken with Climate Change considered as part of this.
- All landowners, including Farmers, had the opportunity to become part of the carbon markets.
- Transport plays a large role in carbon emissions and was a large part of an individual resident and visitor's carbon footprint. SDNPA worked closely with the Highways Authorities across the park.
- The Climate Change Action Plan placed a strong emphasis on partnership working with local communities. The 'Community energy pathway' project had supported local communities to develop community based energy projects. Officers agreed with the suggestion that more publicity should be given to the work and the story of the community based work.

- Exemplar projects would be communicated back to Central Government, highlighting where the SDNPA was ahead of others in delivery to net zero.

176. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

- 1) Note the report on progress made in delivering the SDNPA Climate Change Action Plan.

ITEM 10: Q3 CORPORATE AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE REPORT

177. The Performance and Research Lead introduced report PR21/22-31 and reminded members of the report content.

178. The Head of Income Generation informed the committee that South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) had agreed the award of £200,000 from the Get Britain Building Fund for the Seven Sisters improvements and was now awaiting endorsement from the SELEP Strategic Board.

179. The Committee commented that:

- The report was much clearer and was very useful to have a section on the top level targets to allow Members to track progress. The structure of the report matching to that of the Corporate Plan was also helpful and useful to enable the committee to monitor progress.
- The red RAG target of introducing a new pre application-charging schedule should be removed as it had been agreed that it was no longer a priority.

180. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

- 1) Note the content of the Performance Report and highlight areas requiring further clarification or action

ITEM 11: HEATHLANDS REUNITED END OF PROJECT REVIEW

181. The Director of Countryside and Policy Management and the Heathlands Reunited Project Manager introduced report PR21/22-32, set the project in context and reminded members of the report content.

182. The Committee commented that:

- When approving projects an aspect that should be given consideration was what was the legacy and ongoing commitment once the project came to an end? This was not a criticism of the project but in order for the heathlands restoration work to be maintained there needed to be human intervention.
- One of the project legacies is the SAMM project which was funded in perpetuity through a S106 agreement of which SDNPA currently had the contract to deliver. The project had the opportunity to promote the SDNP more widely.

183. In response to questions Officers clarified that:

- Heathlands reunited was more than just reuniting the Heathlands it was also about building the partnerships between the different stakeholders. Since the project finished the partners had missed this opportunity to work together and thought was being given as to how this could be replicated.
- Ranger run volunteer work was still continuing on the Heathlands.
- The Document 'Managing Heathland Heritage' would be circulated to Members of the Committee.

184. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

- 1) Note the report and endorse the recommendations and actions arising from the evaluation set out at section 5 of the report.

185. The Committee adjourned for a lunch break at 13:15

186. Morris Findley left the meeting.
187. The Chair informed the Committee that the remainder of the agenda would be reordered, and the agenda items would be taken in the order of item 12, 15, 16, 17, 13, 14, 18, 20 & 19.

ITEM 12: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

188. The Head of Governance & Support Services introduced report PR21/22-33 and reminded members of the report content, highlighting that the risk register was now presented in a new format in order that it complied with accessibility standards.
189. The Chair informed the Committee that the Risk Register Briefing had taken place with many members of the Committee in attendance and included looking at the Risk Management Policy which would be brought to a future committee.
190. The Committee commented that:
191. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- There was an active search underway for possible country park acquisition in the western area of the SDNP.
192. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
- 1) Note the Corporate Risk Register as at February 2022.

ITEM 15: EXTERNAL AUDIT – AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT AND SECTOR UPDATE

193. The External Auditor introduced report PR21/22-36 and reminded members of the report content including that the deadline for Audited Statement of Accounts had been pushed back until November 22.
194. The Committee commented that:
- Although central government had not yet developed with Local Authorities any overall expectations about their roles in achieving the national net zero target this should not deter SDNPA from setting a good example.
195. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- Currently Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) requirements were not a statutory requirement for investment, but were becoming increasingly relevant. Generally, as public authorities, Local Authorities were only able to invest funds in high credit-rated intuitions, which were mainly banks, which did limit the options available and consequently the investment returns. BHCC had no direct control on where these funds were placed once invested with the banks and could not currently stipulate that funds were not invested in fossil fuels.
 - Although there was little consistency on how Local Authorities reported on net zero there was consistency between the National Parks, with all National Parks trying to encourage Local Authorities within National Park boundaries to adopt a similar reporting framework.
 - West Sussex County Council administered the pension fund and most pension funds had ESG statements.
196. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
- 1) Note the report.

ITEM 16: INTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY AND ANNUAL AUDIT PLAN

197. The Chief Internal Auditor introduced report PR21/22-37 and reminded members of the report content. Within the introduction the Internal Auditor explained that Audit work to support the South Downs Trading Company was not part of this plan and would be provided, as required, as one off contracts and directly to the company itself.

198. In response to questions Officers clarified that:
- Extensive work had happened to action the findings of the ICT Audit and the Auditors were now confident that the agreed actions had been implemented to a high standard and did not need to be revisited again next year.

199. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

- 1) Approve the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan for 2022/23.

ITEM 17: INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS AND IMPLEMENTATION

200. The Chief Internal Auditor introduced report PR21/22-38 and reminded members of the report content.

201. The Committee commented that:

- 1) The Treasury Management action of including the parameters for investing in B&HCC were not in the Treasury Management Strategy 2022/23.

202. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note:

- 1) Progress against the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan (2021/22).
- 2) The implementation of audit actions previously agreed by management.

ITEM 13: TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022/23

203. The Section 151 Officer introduced report PR21/22-34 and reminded members of the report content. As part of the introduction the Section 151 Officers informed members that BHCC were constantly looking at the best returns for the Authority's investments and receives daily alerts and updates from its independent Treasury Adviser (LINK) to assist in this. Due to liquidity requirement, investments were currently restricted to 1 year and focused on the security and liquidity, which necessarily results in a more restricted list of high credit-rated investment counterparties. With the current prevalence of low interest rates it is difficult for other products to out-perform the pooled rate of return provided by BHCC, although the increasing interest rate environment could see this change shortly.

204. The Committee commented that:

- 1) It was reassured that the investment with B&HCC was guided by the best interest rates and the returns available to SDNPA and although the parameters for investment were not within the Treasury Management report presented to the Committee (as recommended as an action within the Internal Audit report) it was reassured that investment was guided by the best interest rates available. .

205. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

- 1) Recommend that the National Park Authority ("NPA") approves the Treasury Management Strategy 2022/23 as set out in Appendix 1 comprising the:
 - Treasury Management Policy Statement 2022/23;
 - Borrowing Strategy 2022/23;
 - Prudential and Treasury Indicators 2022/23 to 2024/25;
 - Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement; and
 - Annual Investment Strategy 2022/23 including the benchmark risk factor of 0.05%.

206. Annie Brown left the meeting

ITEM 14: BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2021/22: MONTH 9

207. The Section 151 Officer introduced report PR21/22-25 and reminded members of the report content.

208. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

1. Note the 2021/22 Revenue Forecast position as at month 9 of a net (£364,000) below budget variance.
2. Note the 2021/22 Capital Forecast position as at month 9 of a zero budget variance and recommend that the National Park Authority (the “NPA”) approve the additional capital variations as set out in Appendix 2.
3. Note the Reserves position as at month 9, Appendix 3
4. Note the Treasury Management overview and position as at month 9, Appendix 4.

ITEM 18: PROCUREMENT – CONTRACT FOR CONSTRUCTION OF EGRETS WAY PHASE 6

209. The Head of Business Services introduced report PR21/22-39 and reminded members of the report content.

210. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- As much detail as possible would be added to the specification about delivering in a sustainable manor.
- The Covid-19 Pandemic had highlighted how well used the route was and provided a strategic link between Newhaven and Lewes. Thanks were expressed to the Officers and all those involved in championing the project.

211. **RESOLVED:** The Committee Resolved to:

- 1) Approve the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor to undertake the construction of Egrets Way Phase 6.
- 2) Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to award contracts for the above, following a competitive process as described in this report.

212. Michael Lunn left the meeting

ITEM 20: PROCUREMENT – CONTRACT FOR CONSTRUCTION OF CENTURION WAY EXTENSION (WEST DEAN TO SINGLETON)

213. The Head of Business Services introduced report PR21/22-41 and reminded members of the report content. The Cycling Project Officer also helped to answer questions.

214. In response to questions Officers clarified that:

The bat surveys for three tunnels had been delayed because of Covid-19 and have now been undertaken for 1 year. Planning Permission already in place to go round the three tunnels. Potential designs could include seasonal access through one or more of the tunnels.

- The planning application examined the Biodiversity Net Gain which was incorporated into the route design.
- If the West Dean to Singleton section could be completed in linear sense, without stopping, it would take approximately 3-4 months, but it was unlikely that it would be able to be completed in a linear way.

215. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

1. Approve the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor to undertake the construction of Centurion Way Extension (West Dean to Singleton section)
2. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to award contracts for the above, following a competitive process as described in this report.

216. Stephen Whale left the meeting

ITEM 19: PROCUREMENT – SEVEN SISTERS COUNTRY PARK FURTHER CONSTRUCTION WORKS

217. The Head of Business Services introduced report PR21/22-40 and reminded members of the report content. As part of the introduction the Head of Business Services informed the Committee that the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) Accountability Board had agreed the award of £200k for the Seven Sisters building works, including the extension of the spend to the end of September and was now awaiting endorsement by the SELEP Strategic Board at their meeting next month. No contracts would be let until after the award of the funding was known.
218. In response to questions Officers clarified that:
- 1) Construction companies do work well together and Officers did not foresee that there would be an issue if a different contractor were appointed to undertake the additional phase I works to that already working on site.
219. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
- 1) Approve the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor to undertake further construction works at Seven Sisters Country Park as described in paragraph 1.5 of the report and as confirmed at the meeting.
 - 2) Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to award contracts for the above, following a competitive process as described in this report.

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 14.52

