

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**
Date **10 December 2024**
By **Authority Chair**
Title of Report **Authority Chair Update**

Note

Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to note the update from the Chair of the South Downs National Park Authority.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report outlines the activities of the Chair and the Members of the SDNPA since the NPA meeting on the 17 October 2024.

2. Update

Member activities

- 2.1 Members had a workshop updating them on Nature Recovery work across the Park on the morning of 17 October. Thanks to Laura Sercombe, Claire Kerr, Cath Jackson and the team for some excellent presentations and special thanks to Aimee Felus from the Western Sussex Rivers Trust for speaking to us about their work. Members Steve Ridgeon and Theresa Fowler then spoke to us about nature recovery work in their areas. Steve about the River Meon and nature restoration in Buriton and Theresa on the work that Brighton & Hove CC are doing. We also got to see a film on the Fair Game project, which aims to use archaeology to promote sustainable management of fallow deer in the South Downs.
- 2.2 On the 21 November a workshop entitled “A Vision of Belonging” was held with members before P&R committee that day. This was an opportunity for those members and officers who attended the National Parks UK conference in September, which had Equity, diversity and Inclusion as its theme, to pass on learnings from that event and to start to progress that work at NPA level.
- 2.3 This work will keep evolving and I encourage all members who haven’t completed the online training through Pearn Kandola to please revisit that asap. If you need help, please let myself or committee officer know.
- 2.4 Members Jerry Pett, John Hyland, Rob Mocatta & Steven Ridgeon attended the winter meeting of the Meon Valley Partnership (MVP). The news was shared that the whole of the River Meon is to be a compensatory habitat for the protected features of the River Itchen SAC, which will suffer adverse impacts as a result of abstraction. Exactly what the impact will be on the River Meon will be determined in the near future and the MVP will take an active role in this. Discussion and actions were also agreed on projects including the River Meon Restoration at East Meon, Himalayan Balsam removal at various points along the River Meon and next steps on the analysis of invertebrates in the River in 2023. The 'Splash Route' in Droxford, and helping landowners navigate planning permission for dew ponds was also on the agenda.

- 2.5 Thanks to members Stephen McAuliffe and Stephen Whale for attending the heathland clearance event on 26 November.

Chair's activities

- 2.6 The 75th Anniversary of the National Parks & Countryside Act falls on December 16 this year and, in the lead up to the date, there have been a number of celebratory events.
- 2.7 I attended Natural England's event marking the anniversary on 21 October in Parliament. There were some great speeches from Marian Spain and Tony Juniper, but it was the Youngwilders that really inspired those gathered to think towards the next 75 years and to approach that with an eye to social justice.
- 2.8 John Dower, who's report, written in 1945, paved the way for the Act, was commemorated with a blue plaque at the Youth Hostel Association (YHA) in Malham, Yorkshire Dales on 18 November. Many representatives from across the landscapes sector were there to hear John's son Robin speak about his father's work. The original YHA building was designed by John Dower, so was a fitting spot of the plaque. The day included a walk by local farmer and Yorkshire Dales NPA member, Neil Heseltine around his farm in the village. We were later present when two groups of school children from Liverpool arrived for the overnight stay as part of the Generation Green programme. It looked like they were going to have a lot of fun as snow was due that evening.
- 2.9 I attended the National Park Partnerships (NPP) Big Ideas Forum on 18 October which gathered officers and members from across the 15 UK National Parks to hear more about NPP's refreshed strategy and plans for the coming years. We were also fortunate to have a keynote speech from Dieter Fenkart-Froeschl, Chief Operating Officer of the US National Park Foundation outlining how National Parks in the US have repositioned themselves as "America's Storyteller" and the impact that working closely with all the Parks, with a strong National message has led to a huge increase in philanthropic donations; over \$189m in 2022!
- 2.10 NPP's AGM, which I attended on 6 November, endorsed the strategy for 2024-2027.
- 2.11 I am pleased that we are continuing to introduce new local MPs to the National Park and update them on the work we do in their constituency. On 15 November, myself, Tim Slaney, Claire Keer and ranger Tim Squire took James MacCleary, MP for Lewes around Lullington Heath on the eastern Downs. We introduced him to the prospective Super National Nature Reserve that will cover the Heritage Coast area and up to the Heath and why chalk grassland habitat is so special.

National Parks England

- 2.12 I chaired National Parks England (NPE) board on 22 October in person in London and followed this with a walking meeting in the Peak District with Andrew McCloy, chair of Campaign for National Parks (CNP), where we discussed how important a good relationship is between our two organisations.
- 2.13 NPE Executive Director, Jayne Butler and I have secured a meeting with Minister Mary Creagh on 11 December.

Forthcoming Events

- 2.14 National Park Protectors Awards on 11 December in London.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 I am happy to respond to any questions that may arise from this update and will provide any further updates as needed at the meeting.

VANESSA ROWLANDS

Authority Chair

South Downs National Park Authority

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Appendices	None
SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive (Interim); Head of Governance.
External Consultees	None
Background Documents	None

