

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Parish & Town Councils March 2022

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

Newsletters and communications

Parish Clerks and others receive copies of the SDNPA e-Newsletters (*South Downs News*) and anyone can sign up to have the [newsletter delivered to their inbox](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/publications/south-downs-news-the-newsletter-for-the-national-park/) every month. Past issues of the e-newsletter can be read as pdf documents via this link: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/publications/south-downs-news-the-newsletter-for-the-national-park/>

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

Parishes should also be receiving copies of the NPA's Planning Newsletter (the most recent edition [Winter 2021-22] is available [here](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-newsletter/)) and others can subscribe to receive these newsletters via this link: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-newsletter/>

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

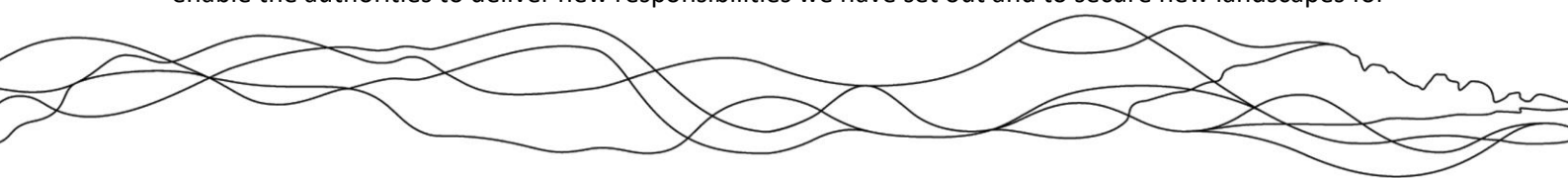
To complement the other sources of information referred to above I will highlight the following:

- Some national context
- Government's response to the 2019 Landscape Review
- Parish Council workshops and webinars during 2022
- Climate Change Action Plan
- BOATs (Byways Open to All Traffic)
- Planning Enforcement
- Grant support for schools
- Grants to help 'Beeline' projects
- Butser Hill project
- Support for Cultural Attractions
- The Heathlands Reunited project
- Dark Skies Festival
- Funding for local projects
- Local contacts.

Some national context

Like all other National Park Authorities in England it is expected that the **financial settlement** from Government for 2022/23 will be 'flat cash' (ie. no allowance for inflation) and it is understood that this is quite likely to be the situation for the following two years as well. This will already be the third year that there has been a flat cash settlement and, with overall inflation in the economy beginning to gather pace, the financial position of National Parks is likely to become more difficult in the medium term.

Prudent decisions made by SDNPA in previous years means that a balanced **budget** can be delivered in 2022/23 but the emerging situation is far from what was recommended in the Government's independent review of protected landscapes (Julian Glover's Landscape Review). His proposal (27) stressed that more funding was required for National Park Authorities (and AONBs), with security across five-year periods. The report said that "this is justified to redress historical under-funding, to enable the authorities to deliver new responsibilities we have set out and to secure new landscapes for



the nation.” It looks likely that National Park Authorities will not be able to do anything new without significant reductions in some of their existing activities ...

SDNPA will be finalising its **Corporate Plan** for the forthcoming year very shortly and this will, inevitably, recognise the need to have a very sharp focus, concentration of effort, stop doing some things and deliver as much impact as possible from fewer activities. It will focus on three main areas: Nature Recovery, Climate Action and A National Park for All – which align well with the expectations set out in the Defra consultation on the Landscape Review.

Recent **feedback from Defra** confirms that SDNPA continues to deliver good value for money with praise for imagination and innovation, particularly in relation to the Nature Recovery Campaign, CIL, the delivery of Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL), the creation of a trading company and the acquisition of the Seven Sisters Country Park.

Government’s response to the 2019 Landscape Review

There is much of interest in the Government’s response to the Glover Review which highlights the valuable roles that National Parks and AONBs play for nature and people. But it is noticeable that some important proposals from the Review are not addressed at all and that there is little reference to the climate crisis in spite of clear messages from COP 26. The SDNPA is studying the consultation carefully and will be submitting a detailed response. In the meantime others are being encouraged to feed into the consultation as well – including a special SDNPA on-line workshop for Parish Councils on 16 March devoted to the issue. Defra information about the consultation is available [here](#), the Government’s response to the Landscapes Review can be found [here](#) and the consultation can be found [here](#). It is hoped that many Parish Councils and others will respond prior to the deadline of 9 April.

Parish Council workshops and webinars during 2022

In addition to the on-line event for all parish councils on 16 March (Government’s Consultation on its response to the Glover Landscape Review), proposals for the rest of the year are currently as follows:

- July 13th (6.30-8.00pm): a virtual webinar about Climate Change (on Zoom) – including good examples of community climate action from across the National Park
- October: In person parish meetings (one per county) – contents / topics / issues yet to be determined.

Thoughts, reflections and suggestions about these joint events are always welcomed.

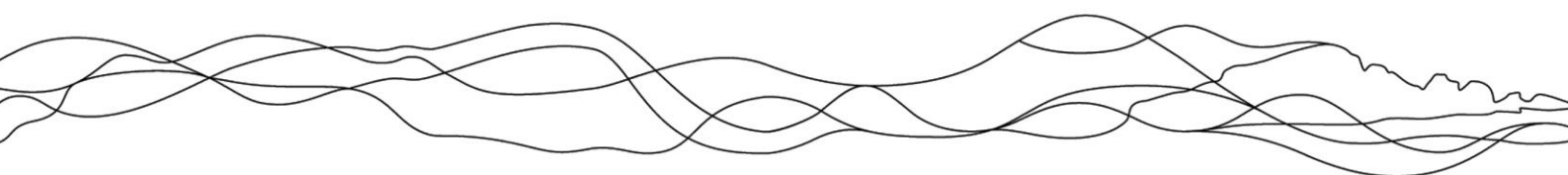
Previous webinars (including Dark Night Skies and Nature Recovery) can be viewed via this link:

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-communities/parish-webinars/>

Climate Change Action Plan

The SDNPA approved its Climate Change Action Plan in March 2020: setting a target for the Authority to become a ‘Net Zero’ organisation by 2030; agreeing to work with constituent Local Authorities and other partners (particularly local communities and landowners) to deliver actions; working towards the National Park becoming ‘Net Zero with Nature’ by 2040; and creating a climate change action fund.

A very valuable piece of work has recently been completed for SDNPA by Small World Consulting, which includes a consumption-based carbon footprint for the whole of the National Park. Amongst many other fascinating facts, this work indicates that the annual carbon consumption of residents (2,157,019 tCO₂e) dwarfs that of visitors in the National Park (388,211 tCO₂e) or visitors travelling to and from the National Park (665,729 tCO₂e). The annual carbon footprint per capita within the National Park is also significantly higher than the UK national average, suggesting that there is real potential for community projects in the Park to increase awareness and change behaviours. As well as reducing emissions from communities, businesses, households and individuals, land within the national park may be able to soak up more carbon through changes in farming, nature recovery etc. It is also possible that some of the carbon that can be removed can legitimately offset activities elsewhere where they cannot realistically achieve net zero, even when all other options have been explored. This could generate more income for land managers in the South Downs in the future. With the evidence and ideas from the recent consultancy study, plans for the best ways of achieving the challenging targets can be developed. As already explained above, the next on-line webinar event for parishes (on July 13th) is due to be devoted to Climate Change – including good examples of community action.



BOATs (Byways Open to All Traffic)

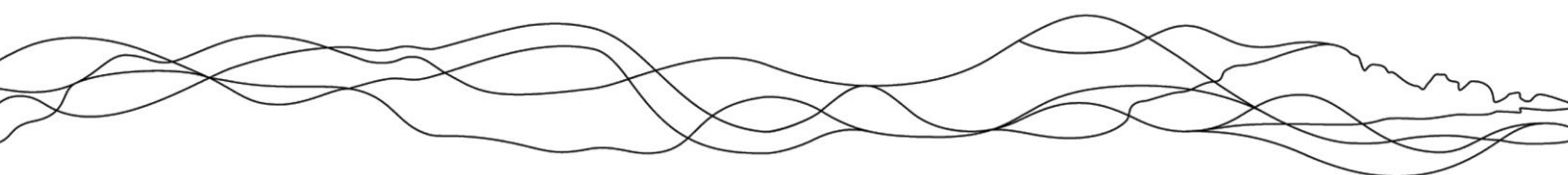
One of the main topics raised in the discussion periods of recent Parish Council Workshop meetings for Hampshire parishes (in 2020 and 2021) was problems encountered on BOATs in the East Hampshire part of the National Park. The topic has also been raised in the Government's response to the Glover Landscape Review and so may be discussed again at the SDNPA parish workshop event on 16 March. Parish Councils have the opportunity to respond to the Government consultation on its response to the Glover Review (deadline 9 April) where there are four questions (14-17) about green lanes, two of which (14 and 16) allow reasons for answers to be given, enabling respondents to describe issues in their area. A special internal workshop for SDNPA Members was held in January to provide background about the topic and a paper produced by EHAPTC was circulated to all the Members – including photographs of damage and disruption. Members considered pros and cons of interventions by the NPA and it has been agreed that the matter will be discussed at the meeting of the Park Authority on the afternoon of Thursday 19 May: a jointly produced SDNPA / HCC paper will outline the current position regarding BOATs in the Hampshire part of the National Park and will explain the working relationship between the two organisations. There will be opportunities for public speakers to address the meeting and it is understood that Jim MacDonald (EHAPTC Chair) has already been specifically invited. There may also be opportunities for him to work with the relevant officers prior to the meeting in May: Andy Gatticker (SDNPA) and Jonathan Woods (HCC).

Planning Enforcement

The SDNPA Planning Committee has recently considered the performance of the Planning Enforcement service in the national park: an important role in helping to conserve and enhance both the natural and built environment. The authority is committed to ensuring that planning legislation is enforced and where planning permission is granted, approved plans and conditions are followed. It is recognised that there are a number of different sorts of breaches of planning control, including: development not in accordance with the approved plans of a planning permission; a material change of use of a building or land; failure to comply with conditions attached to a planning permission; unauthorised works to trees protected by tree preservation orders or in a conservation area; works to a listed building without listed building consent; unauthorised demolition in a conservation area; and displaying a sign or advertisement without advertisement consent. The Authority always tries negotiation first: aiming for the unauthorised use to cease, to remove any unauthorised development or to persuade people to comply with conditions on a permitted development. Negotiations can also encourage people to apply for retrospective planning permission where necessary. When negotiation does not work, the Authority has legal powers which it is able to enforce. In an average year, there are usually over 1,000 enforcement cases across the National Park and more information and advice is available in the SDNPA's [Enforcement Guide](#).

Grant support for schools

More than 1,400 disadvantaged young people will be able to enjoy an outdoor learning adventure this year, thanks to a new funding boost from the South Downs National Park Trust supported by American Express and others. Schools will be able to apply for grants to help deliver fun educational experiences, such as hands-on conservation work, wildlife surveying, practical geography and geology, or learning ways to tackle climate change. This builds on the success of the grants scheme last year when thousands of children enjoyed trips to beautiful sites in the National Park or took part in nature-based activities at school. Schools with more than 10 per cent of pupils eligible for Free School Meals can apply for support when planning trips and they can receive a grant up to £750 towards the costs of travel and activities when visiting a site or provider in the South Downs Learning Network of over 100 learning providers. Grant categories also include Virtual Visits (all state-funded schools and colleges are eligible to apply for up to £75 towards the cost of booking a virtual session with an education provider) and In-school Visits (all state-funded schools and colleges are eligible to apply for up to £250 towards the cost of booking an in-school (or nearby school) learning session with an education provider). Grants are being awarded on a first-come, first served basis. For more information and to apply for a grant visit <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/learning/grants-for-schools/>



Grants to help 'Beeline' projects

The latest opportunity for grants to help 'Beeline' projects (creating wildflower havens and corridors for bees and other pollinators) closed recently. The South Downs National Park Trust, the official independent charity for the National Park, will now study the expressions of interest received from farmers, private landowners, parish councils, local authorities and schools. Many pollinators have been on a steep decline across the UK for several decades and are now under threat from climate change. It is hoped that new planting will help to create a "road system" for these vital insects, allowing them to move through the landscape more easily. Previous funding rounds are helping in a range of locations across the national park, including the Selborne Landscape Partnership.

Butser Hill project

The Western Area team and volunteers have been working hard in recent months on a project, with funding from the National Grid, which aims to enhance the landscape and biodiversity for both wildlife and visitors, whilst opening up alternative views to draw the visitor's eye away from the power lines and associated electrical infrastructure around Butser Hill. Some of the planned works will enhance parts of the National Nature Reserve including at Hillhampton Down (on the southern side of the hill) as well as at Grandfathers Bottom and the car park. The team have removed a lot of scrub, using a mixture of hand tools, brushcutters and a flail mower. Some patches of good quality chalk grassland have been found in between the areas of scrub and these have now been linked up and have the opportunity to spread throughout the site. Work has also started to establish a walking route which leads up to the yew woodland as part of the plans for visitors to enjoy views away from the sight of power lines.

Support for cultural attractions and mental health

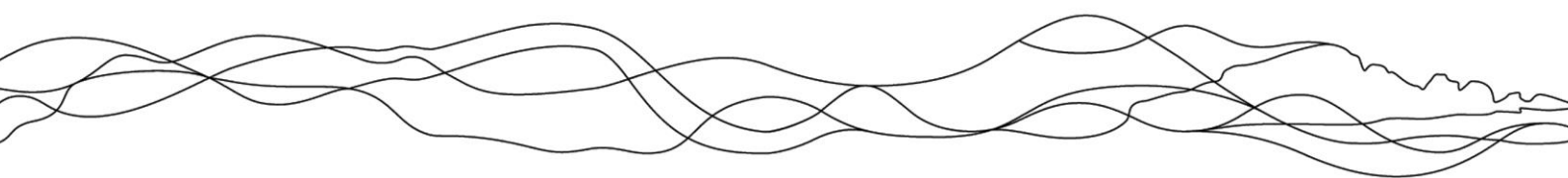
The Allen Gallery in Alton is one of a number of places which is joining together with SDNPA to enhance community engagement. The "Project Thrive!" initiative will introduce localised support for young people, and will utilise the Gallery's collections, garden, and proximity to the South Downs to support young people to build connections with the natural world. The Hampshire Cultural Trust will use its established partnerships with Hampshire Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Children's Services to develop the project for the benefit of mental health and emotional resilience, aligning with the Strategic Needs Assessment for East Hampshire, which has identified a significant gap in tier two mental health provision for young people in Alton and the surrounding areas.

The Heathlands Reunited project

This HLF funded project has been completed recently with its partnership delivering some impressive results, despite Covid. Around 900 hectares of heathland has been enhanced or restored, exceeding the 600 hectares originally planned. The engagement programme was also very successful despite having to move some activities online, and reached a diverse audience. Getting heathlands into a more resilient state – whereby ongoing management is sustainable and economic – is a huge and long-term task, but this project and the group of organisations behind it have shown what can be achieved. The s106 contracts that the SDNPA is delivering in the Whitehill and Bordon area for EHDC provide some continuity in terms of working with local communities, and the ReNature campaign should provide a catalyst for further conservation programmes.

Dark Skies Festival

In spite of some stormy weather the 2022 Dark Skies Festival was very popular, culminating in activities in East Hampshire at the Queen Elizabeth Country Park. The "Walk the Planets" evening there had a huge turnout (the organisers stopped counting after they'd reached 400 people!) and, with clear skies, visitors were able to enjoy some fantastic stargazing, with many seeing Orion's belt, the Pleiades and even the Andromeda Galaxy. The Festival's mix of in-person and online events is proving to be very successful in engaging with young families and underrepresented groups from urban areas beyond the national park. Many were experiencing the park for the first time, giving the SDNPA an excellent opportunity to turn these new experience into a deeper association with nature and with the health and wellbeing benefits of exploring the landscape.



Funding for local projects

If your parish has a project that could bring social, environmental, economic or cultural benefits to a community within the National Park and if the project may need some grant funding, you should still consider applying for a Sustainable Communities Grant or CIL funding. I continue to Chair the NPA's Sustainable Communities Panel, working alongside some experienced panel members from a range of partner organisations. Any partnership or other not-for-profit organisations which include social enterprise, community interest companies, voluntary organisations and 'for profit' organisations (these projects cannot be for financial gain to the business) can apply for funding. Grants are available for up to 50% of the project cost from £250 to a maximum of £10,000. More information is available [here](#).

Local contacts

The Planning Link Officer for East Hampshire is Jean Chambers with contact details 01730 819371 and Jean.Chambers@southdowns.gov.uk. The NPA's Western Downs team acts as a 'first stop shop' for land managers and communities, providing advice and support towards achieving National Park purposes. The team also acts as the 'eyes and ears' on the ground, assisting with a wide range of activities. Contact the team to find out how the NPA may be able to help your community and please encourage anyone interested in volunteering to contact the Countryside & Policy Manager, Nigel James (nigel.james@southdowns.gov.uk) or Lead Ranger Elaina Whittaker-Slark (elaina.whittaker-slark@southdowns.gov.uk).

Although my role is to act in the best interests of the whole of the National Park, I always aim to maintain close contact with Parish Councils in East Hampshire to make sure that all important issues, concerns and ideas are taken into account by the National Park Authority.

Doug Jones, Member of the South Downs National Park Authority and Buriton Parish Council
doug.jones@southdowns.gov.uk

March 2022

