

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 12th June 2013

This is the latest of my regular notes for EHAPTC Meetings about some of the activities of the National Park Authority (NPA) which may be of interest to Parish Councils.

Opportunities to influence NPA plans

- Many Parish Councils have taken part in the intensive period of pre-consultation engagement on the first ever Management Plan for the South Downs National Park – but there is still one final opportunity to help shape policies that will influence the character of the area over the years ahead
- The formal consultation exercise on the Management Plan is due to commence on June 24th and will run for 11 full weeks through to week commencing 13 September
- Parish Clerks will receive documentation to help with responses to the survey and it is hoped that lots of Parish Councils will make arrangements so that they can respond to this important piece of work
- It is also hoped that Parish Councils will help to draw the attention of other ‘stakeholders’, organisations and local residents to the opportunity to ‘have their say’ on the ideas being put forward
- Details will be available via the National Park’s website (<http://www.southdowns.gov.uk>) and there is an area on the website devoted to the Management Plan: <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/about-us/management-plan>
- Amongst issues raised by Parish Councils in East Hampshire has been the issue of BOATs (Byways Open to All Traffic) which do not generally exist in the Sussex parts of the National Park. Some parishes in East Hampshire feel that there are now added pressures from motorised vehicles using these BOATs which can damage the rights of way, disturb the tranquillity of the area and discourage other users (particularly walkers and horse-riders) from using these routes out into the countryside. The forthcoming consultation on the Management Plan will give respondents the opportunity to see whether this issue appears to have been addressed adequately and to make any further representations.

The Joint Core Strategy for East Hampshire: forthcoming Consultation

- As all Parish Councils will already know, planning policies and housing numbers for East Hampshire (up to the year 2028) are being determined by the Joint Core Strategy being developed by the National Park Authority (the Planning Authority for all land inside the boundaries of the National Park) and by East Hampshire District Council
- Following a preliminary report from the inspector conducting the public examination of this Joint Core Strategy, the examination was suspended to allow further work to be carried out to explore levels of housing need across the district along with sustainability appraisals and environmental assessments
- This work is now drawing to a close and the Planning Authorities will soon be undertaking a formal Consultation phase before the Inspector reconvenes the examination
- The consultation period is expected to be from early August to mid-September and Parish Councils may wish to make arrangements to ensure that they can study the proposals and respond. More information is always available at: <http://www.easthants.gov.uk/ehdc/planningpolicy.nsf/webpages/Joint+Core+Strategy+Update>

Help for schools

- The NPA has launched a new 'Learning Zone' on its website to help all the schools in and around the National Park. The 'Our South Downs' initiative provides an on-line portal for teachers and pupils. Designed to offer resources and ideas for many parts of the curriculum, the project is founded on the belief that if care for the landscape can begin at an early age it will probably last a lifetime
- The Learning Zone is fully searchable depending on key stage and subjects areas. There are interactive games, videos and jargon busters as well as facts, figures and 'did you know' information.
- Full details of all the resources available can be found at:
<http://learning.southdowns.gov.uk/> with a map showing potential sites for visits at <http://learningmap.southdowns.gov.uk/>
- Over 60 outdoor learning providers and school staff across the National Park are already contributing to the development of a South Downs Curriculum and associated learning resources which will be hosted on these new pages. More content will be added in the months ahead and ideas from local communities are always welcomed. Simply send a message to: learning@southdowns.gov.uk
- Feedback from recent schools surveys has identified that one of the key barriers to accessing outdoor learning opportunities within the National Park is the cost of travel to sites. To address this issue the NPA has recently launched a new Travel Grant Scheme aimed at schools within more deprived communities. The scheme aims to reduce this barrier and to encourage more young people to have access to the fantastic opportunities for outdoor learning provided within the South Downs National Park. For more information visit: <http://learning.southdowns.gov.uk/help/travel-grant-scheme>

Grants available from the National Park Authority

- I mentioned the NPA's new 'Local Sustainable Transport Fund' in my last note (March 2013). This offers small grants to Parish Councils, businesses, voluntary groups and not for profit organisations to encourage sustainable travel to and in the National Park. More information is available online at <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/communities/funding/sustainable-transport-solutions-fund> or by calling 01730 811755
- More and more communities are now taking advantage of the grants available from the National Park Authority's 'Sustainable Communities Fund'. Funding has been committed to 93 community based projects during the first two years of the scheme with over £670,000 made available to help bring about projects worth over £10 million in total. Grants from the NPA can help to unlock funding from other sources
- Parish Councils, voluntary groups, partnerships or other organisations can apply for funding for non-profit making projects that bring social, environmental, economic or cultural benefits to communities within the National Park
- Recent projects include: funding towards allotments at Adhurst St Mary; community orchards in Hampshire and Sussex; a new accessible telescope at Clanfield Observatory (to help young people, the elderly and less physically able appreciate the rich skies above the National Park); projects to help people with learning and physical disabilities enjoy outdoor experiences; and the recently-opened visitor centre at Butser Ancient Farm
- Some of the best ideas for new projects continue to come from local people and more proposals are always encouraged. Details about these grants can be found in the 'Funding' section of the Park's website (<http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/communities/funding>) and ideas can be discussed with Mark Rose, External Funding Coordinator, on 01730 811755 or Mark.Rose@southdowns.gov.uk.

Planning and Community Planning

- News about the important forthcoming consultation on the East Hampshire Joint Core Strategy is provided on the first page of this note
- About 30 parishes are already using the NPA's Community Planning Toolkit. This guidance helps local communities understand the range of Community Planning tools, techniques and plans that are currently available – and helps them consider what may be best for their area and their circumstances: a new Neighbourhood Plan, a more all-encompassing Parish Plan, a Village Design Statement, a Local Landscape Character Assessments or some other initiative. Parishes with any queries about any of these sorts of projects can contact Chris Paterson on 01730 811766 or chris.paterson@southdowns.gov.uk
- Chris Paterson is also working with the NPA's planning officers to consider how it may be possible to adopt community led plans as formal Supplementary Planning Documents. Chris has developed a comprehensive library of community led plans across the National Park (please let him know if you think that he may not be aware of yours) and he may make contact with Parish Councils in the future to find out more details ...
- The series of special workshops for Parish Councils on the new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which were held in April appear to have been very popular and informative. My extra note circulated by EHAPTC to Parish Clerks early in May explains that Councils are encouraged to submit potential projects for inclusion in the NPA's Infrastructure Delivery Plan by the end of July. It is possible that although some projects may not be suitable for CIL funding, there may be other grants or sources of funds which may be helpful, so, at this stage, parishes need not worry unduly about whether projects are strictly eligible for CIL or not. Information about CIL is available on the NPA website at <http://southdowns.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/community-infrastructure-levy>; copies of the presentation made at the workshop meetings for Parish Councils are at http://southdowns.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/328726/Parish-Workshops-Presentation.pdf; copies of the 'Engagement Pack' circulated to all Parishes in March and used at the workshops to help identify categories of infrastructure and potential projects are available at http://southdowns.gov.uk/_data/assets/word_doc/0006/323745/IDP-Engagement-Pack.doc; more information about the Infrastructure Delivery Plans is available at <http://southdowns.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/community-infrastructure-levy/infrastructure-delivery-plan>; and some Frequently Asked Questions are available (with answers!) at http://southdowns.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/307479/CIL-FAQs-Apr13.pdf. The National Park's Project Manager for all CIL work is Gareth Giles who is very happy to be contacted to discuss any matters: [01730 811135](tel:01730811135) or email CIL@SouthDowns.gov.uk
- A successful series of workshops was held in March and April to help Parish Councils use new enhancements to the on-line consultation process for planning applications. Parish Clerks and Councillors attended the workshops and are now able to use the new 'Consultee Access' facility summarised in my note in March and explained in more detail in a letter to all Clerks
- Finally, a reminder to all parishes that although the vast majority of planning applications are delegated to EHDC and handled much as they were prior to the creation of the National Park, the NPA 'calls in' a small proportion for the attention of its own Planning Committee. These are generally potentially sensitive and important cases. To date, virtually every one of the appeals made against decisions made by the NPA's Planning Committee has been refused by the Planning Inspectorate which is an encouraging sign. Any Parish Councils with any queries about planning matters inside the National Park (or just outside the boundary) should contact the special 'Link Officer' for this area: Natalie Fellows on 01730 234130, 07872 410442 or natalie.fellows@southdowns.gov.uk

Area Operations

- The Hampshire part of the National park is overseen by the Western Downs team based at Queen Elizabeth Country Park (QECF). Recent activities have included:
- An innovative project to tag a number of adders (undertaken by QECF staff and Volunteer Rangers) to track their dispersal and response to forest management. It is hoped this information will be used to inform future management decisions within the public forests of the South Downs
- Work is also underway to map the invasive Himalayan Balsam or Indian balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) in and around the River Rother. The non native plant suppresses the growth of native grasses and flora. In autumn the plants die back, leaving banks bare of vegetation, and liable to erosion. Cutting or strimming below the lowest node will be required on a regular basis for about three years
- The team still has opportunities for volunteering in the area and anyone interested should use the contact details below:
- The rangers for the East Hampshire District areas within the South Downs are Dan Oakley and Rob Nicholls. Please contact nick.heasman@southdowns.gov.uk or 02392572615 for further information on how the South Downs National Park Authority can help your community

Other information

- The National Park Authority has recently launched a marketing tool to help local businesses. The 'Sense of Place' Toolkit provides free marketing resources which will help to promulgate consistent and accurate messages about the National Park. The Toolkit is organised into themes based on the special qualities of area and provides materials for businesses to use freely as part of their own publicity materials. More details are available via the National Park website (www.southdowns.gov.uk) and via <http://www.collabor8.me/new-technologies/tech-articles/south-downs-sense-of-place-toolkit.aspx>
- Another initiative to help local businesses is a new Alton-Selborne 'Food and Drink Trail': http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/333466/SDNPA-Food-and-Drink-Trail.pdf
- With 1.2 million people relying on drinking water drawn from the chalk hills of the National Park, the NPA is now working with the Environment Agency and water companies to identify and tackle pollution so as to help save money spent on water treatment as well as improving the natural environment <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/about-us/news/new-funding-to-target-water-pollution-in-south-downs>
- You can meet members of the National Park Authority at local events over the summer: Winchester Cycle Fest (Sunday 23rd June); The South Downs Wood Fair at Queen Elizabeth Country Park (Saturday 13th and Sunday 14th July); Bioblitz at Queen Elizabeth Country Park (Sunday 11th August); the Big Butterfly Day at Old Winchester Hill Nature Reserve (Saturday 17th August); and at the Alresford Show (Saturday 7th September)

Further information and updates about all the work of the NPA can be found on the National Park website www.southdowns.gov.uk and there is also always plenty of interest on the 'Forum' pages: <http://southdownsforum.ning.com/main>

Although my role is to act in the best interests of the whole of the National Park, I want to continue 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

7th June 2013