

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 26th June 2019

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.

Parish Clerks and others now receive copies of the SDNPA e-Newsletters (*South Downs News*) and anyone can sign up to have the [newsletter delivered to their inbox](#) 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-publications/south-downs-news-the-newsletter-for-the-national-park/>.

To complement these other sources I will provide information about the following:

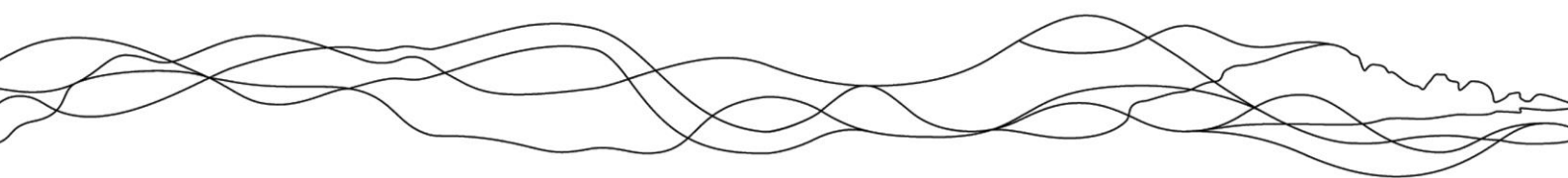
- Effects of recent local elections
- Update on the South Downs Local Plan
- Obtaining National Park Leaflets
- Connecting families with nature
- Return of the Rambler Bus
- National Park entry signs and de-cluttering communities
- Seven Sisters Country Park and Climate Change
- New campaign to save bees and pollinators
- Combatting loneliness
- The 'visitor giving' initiative
- Tackling invasive species
- Achievements of National Park Rangers and Volunteers
- Funding for local projects
- Local contacts.

Effects of local elections

The local elections in May brought a significant change in the Membership of the National Park Authority although the Hampshire area was relatively unaffected. Virtually all the District Councillors on the Park Authority (eleven in total from Councils all the way from Winchester to Eastbourne) have changed and, at the time of writing, only one of the six Parish Councillors is still in place. With no elections in the three County Councils, their representatives each remain on the Park Authority and the seven members appointed directly by the Secretary of State are also unaffected. I may be able to provide a further update at the meeting on 26th. A major induction programme is being arranged to ensure that all the new Members are equipped to engage with the work of the Authority.

South Downs Local Plan (2014-2033)

The National Park Authority has received the final version of the Inspector's report on the Local Plan which concludes that the Plan is sound subject to the modest modifications which were consulted upon earlier in the year and which have now been incorporated into the final version. The final stage of the process is 'adoption', which is scheduled to take place at the full Authority meeting on 2nd July. The Plan will then provide an up-to-date and landscape-led set of policies by which to determine all planning applications across the National Park. The Plan and all the policy maps will soon be on the National Park's website and my understanding is that all Parish Councils will receive a hard copy. There will be training for EHDC Councillors early in July and for all Parish Councils in the autumn. Parishes will also be briefed with more information about CIL (including responsibilities in relation to the funding) and an update about the re-adoption of all the currently adopted Village Design Statements.



Obtaining National Park Leaflets

Pubs, shops and other outlets can register to receive National Park leaflets by signing up to the distribution system called 'Brochure Connect': just click here - [Brochure connect](#). Outlets can sign up free of charge and select the leaflets that they would like and then Brochure Connect delivers to them as well as keeping a record of who, where and what ... Stocks are normally replenished in the spring and keep going until they are gone. The system looks something like this:



One of the latest leaflets offers two beautiful walks in the East Meon area with opportunities to see kingfishers, fish and even water voles in the crystal clear waters of the River Meon as well as the lure of two pubs for some tasty local delicacies. All is revealed in [this new walks leaflet](#).

Connecting families with nature

A major new initiative to connect families with nature through fun outdoor learning experiences has been launched with a particular focus on inner city or highly-urbanised locations near the National Park, where children and their parents have had little or no access to wild places such as the South Downs. Thanks to funding from Forest Holidays, starter packs (rucksacks of outdoor equipment such as maps, binoculars, waterproofs and nature guides) will be given to selected community centres and children's centres and there will also be a dedicated outreach post for two years to deliver the project. Activities will take place during school holidays and families will be encouraged to complete a John Muir award, a national environmental award that encourages people of all backgrounds to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places. With two million people living within 5km of the National Park, it is hoped that the project will allow people to benefit from the many health, well-being and educational opportunities in the South Downs and to learn more about the natural environment.

Return of the Rambler Bus

The South Downs Rambler bus returns to the area this summer providing opportunities to explore the area without cars. Taking in a range of fantastic views and key attractions between Winchester and Petersfield, the Rambler runs every Sunday from July 7 to September 8, as well as the August Bank Holiday Monday. The bus takes a scenic view from Winchester to Petersfield railway stations and back again – via the Winchester Science Centre and Planetarium, views at Cheesefoot Head, the gardens of Hinton Ampner, the Iron Age fort at Old Winchester Hill, the Langrish House Hotel and a number of traditional villages and pubs. The initiative is in conjunction with the Community Rail Partnership and is a great way for families (and ramblers) to see Hampshire parts of the Downs. [See the full timetables here](#) and [see the full bus route here](#) or visit: <http://southdownsbybus.squarespace.com/the-south-downs-rambler> or www.easthampshirerail.co.uk

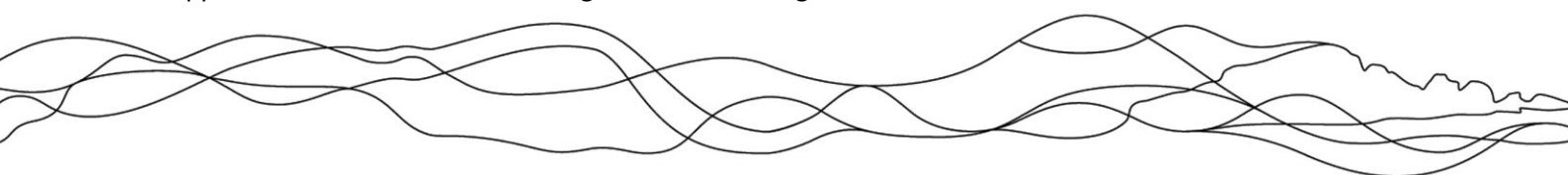
National Park entry signs and de-cluttering communities

The pilot stage for the new entry signs, welcoming people to the National park, has now been completed and responses from the public have been overwhelmingly positive. A report is due to be presented to the next meeting of the full Park Authority so that consideration can be given to lessons learnt from the pilot phase and ideas for a second phase. Parishes and communities have welcomed the new signs and hope that the Park Authority can help to de-clutter the public realm more generally. The forthcoming report to the National Park Authority will also consider this issue.

Seven Sisters Country Park – and Climate Change

The Government's amendment to the Climate Change Act, making the UK the first member of the G7 group of industrialised nations to legislate for net zero carbon emissions, has a target date of 2050 which fits well with the National Park's vision for the same year. As the government's thinking develops on the mechanisms to achieve the target the Park Authority will no doubt examine its own long term planning to ensure that policies are well aligned. The National Park is already leading in an integrated approach to planning (new Local Plan etc), land management (Whole Estate Plans), farm clusters and landscape-scale delivery. National Parks can probably attempt to lead the way in a move to net zero but concerted action across government will be needed for the target to become a reality.

East Sussex County Council has recently identified the South Downs National Park Authority as the preferred organization to take over the ownership and management of the Seven Sisters Country Park so as to keep the site in public ownership and ensure a range of improvements for habitats and visitors. There is an opportunity to make it a national centre for biodiversity, conservation and climate change, telling the story of the extraordinary landscape to a wide audience and using it to test out new approaches to the national challenge of climate change.



New campaign to save bees and pollinators

Nearly £5,000 was raised by the South Downs National Park Trust in the first three weeks of a new campaign to help reverse the decline of bees in the South East. The campaign is working with farmers and other landowners to create new wildflower corridors – a “road system” for insects – that will link habitats and encourage pollination and it is hoped that £75,000 can be raised. Statistics show that a third of Britain’s bee population has disappeared over the past decade and a quarter of Europe’s bumblebees are now threatened with extinction. But bees pollinate around a third of food crops and 90% of wild plants. Key pollinating species in the National Park include honey bees, bumblebees, and the Adonis blue butterfly. More information about this campaign can be found via this web-link:

www.southdownstrust.org.uk/beelines/

Combatting loneliness

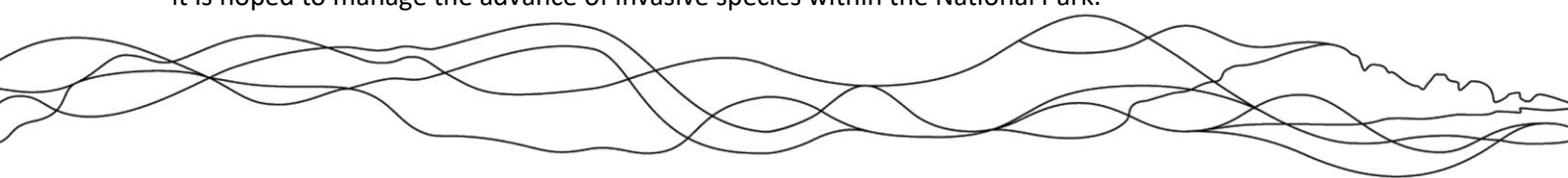
As a contribution towards ‘Loneliness Awareness Week’ the National Park Authority highlighted some opportunities for individuals and communities to consider. Statistics suggest that there are 1.2 million chronically lonely older people in the UK and the number of over-50s experiencing loneliness is set to reach two million by 2025/6 (both Age UK studies). Parish Councillors may be able to help to draw attention to some of the opportunities, including the plethora of voluntary groups across the National Park which can appeal to a range of interests, including wildlife, local history and landscapes. There is more information here <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/volunteering-2/conservation-groups>. The Park Authority will be providing a series of free ranger-led heathland walks throughout the summer with opportunities to find out more about the amazing wildlife (including lizards) and enjoy a natter with other walkers (<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/heathland/heathlands-reunited/walks-talks>) and there will also be some “Walk The Downs” Health Walks towards the eastern end of the Park for which bookings can be made via Luke Greenwood: 01323 408862 or by email to luke.greenwood@waveleisure.co.uk. Cycling provides other opportunities to avoid loneliness and the Park Authority has joined together with ‘Cycle Seahaven’ to provide a series of regular, free guided rides until September. To book on a ride visit <https://cycleseahaven.org.uk/ride-the-downs-calendar-ride-descriptions>. And the South Downs Centre is now open on Saturday mornings again (until the end of October), providing a treasure trove of information about the National Park and an interesting exhibition. More information is available here: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/south-downs-centre-launches-new-saturday-opening-hours/>

Buriton’s “Village Inn” joins ‘visitor giving’ initiative

With the aim of helping to protect the South Downs National Park for future generations, the Village Inn in Buriton has become an official Visitor Giving Partner of the South Downs Trust. The partnership means guests have the option of donating on top of the cost of their stay to help protect the National Park’s beautiful landscapes. All donations will go to the Trust, which is working closely with national and community-based organisations for the benefit of the National Park and the people for whom it was created. Among the initiatives the Trust is helping to fund are new community cycling and walking routes, including for those with limited mobility and young families, and the protection of endangered species. Visitor giving is a simple way of inviting voluntary donations from visitors, inspiring them to put something back into looking after the places they love to visit. Any business interested can contact Sandra Grant on Sandra.Grant@southdownstrust.org.uk or call 01730 819223.

Tackling invasive species

Although people may enjoy the colourful blooms of rhododendron, invasive non-native species such as this are now regarded as the second greatest threat to global biodiversity after habitat loss – and they are causing significant problems for a wide range of species and habitats across the National Park. In the UK there are now over 1800 [invasive non-native species](#) in a wide range of environments and the Park Authority has produced a strategy to focus on the most widespread and damaging species that can be tackled in the area, including: Giant hogweed, New Zealand Pigmy Weed, Floating pennywort, Japanese knotweed, Rhododendron, Cotoneaster, American mink, Himalayan balsam, Water fern, American Skunk Cabbage and Parrots feather. By working with partners and building good quality data it is hoped to manage the advance of invasive species within the National Park.



Achievements of National Park Rangers and Volunteers

From meeting with farmers, offering training and support to local communities, leading walks, organising and training volunteers, controlling invasive species and supporting key species, South Downs National Park Rangers and volunteers are out in the National Park almost every day of the week.

In the last few months thousands of hours of work have been provided by volunteers in the Volunteer Ranger Service, contributing towards National Park purposes including: riverside management, surveying open access sites and their signage etc, installing new signage at nature reserves, clearing vegetation on rights of way, burning brash and controlling bracken to open up glades and encourage heather growth.

Rangers have also engaged with school children to teach them about special habitats in the National Park and in the summer there is to be further engagement with under-represented groups within the South Downs.

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 consider applying for a Sustainable Communities Grant or CIL funding. At the time of writing I continue to be the Chair of 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 via: <http://southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/supporting-communities-business/sustainable-communities-fund/>

Local contacts

The Planning Link Officer role for East Hampshire is being covered by both Nat Belderson and Hannah Chapman. In the first instance, queries can be sent to Hannah: Hannah.Chapman@southdowns.gov.uk and 01730 819270; Nat.Belderson@southdowns.gov.uk and 01730 819307.

The Authority's Western Downs team acts as a 'first stop shop' for communities and land managers, 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 21 June 2019

