

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 6th March 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

- Work to identify a wide range of important issues to be included in the first ever Management Plan for the South Downs National Park is well underway and further reactions from Parish Councils are currently being sought: a significant opportunity to help shape policies that will influence the character of the area over the years ahead ...
- Following a series of workshops in the autumn of 2012 and a very well attended meeting in Meonstoke on 26th February 2013 (attended by about 70 Parish Council representatives from the East Hampshire and Winchester districts), the NPA has now circulated an **on-line survey to all parish clerks** to be completed by 1st April 2013
- This is an opportunity to say whether you agree or disagree with emerging policies – and to highlight areas where you think that any of your projects might contribute towards the aims being explored...
- Parish Clerks will also receive documentation to help with responses to the survey and it is hoped that lots of Parish Councils will respond to this important piece of work
- This is an opportunity for Parish Councils to help influence and adjust policies before a formal 'Public Consultation' exercise in a few months time
- As well as influencing the contents of the Management Plan, results from the current survey will also be helpful to the NPA as it begins to think about its Local Plan to consider future development in the National Park.

Grants available from the National Park Authority

- The NPA has launched a new 'Local Sustainable Transport Fund' offering small grants to encourage sustainable travel. Parish Councils along with businesses, voluntary groups and not for profit organisations can take advantage of this new fund for projects which encourage people to travel sustainably to and in the National Park. Grants from between £250 to £15,000 (and up to 75 percent of a project) are available for projects able to demonstrate an effective plan that encourages long-term changes in the way people travel and gets more people travelling by foot, bike and public transport. Organisations that are outside but within 5 km of the National Park boundary can also apply for funding if they demonstrate a clear link to these aims. Examples of the kinds of projects the fund can support include cycle parking and cycle-friendly street furniture; small scale improvements to access for cyclists and walkers of all abilities; guided walking and cycling experiences, self guided walks and cycle routes maps; initiatives that provide access to a bicycle; update of leaflets/maps for visitor attractions; charging points for electric vehicles. More information about the scheme is available online at <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/communities/funding/sustainable-transport-solutions-fund> or by calling 01730 811755
- Many communities are now taking advantage of the grants available from the National Park Authority's 'Sustainable Communities Fund'. 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. 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.

Planning

- Following a preliminary report from the inspector conducting the examination of the East Hampshire Joint Core Strategy, the examination has been suspended (for about nine months) to allow further work to be carried out to explore levels of housing need across the district along with sustainability appraisals and environmental assessments. The Joint Core Strategy, which will influence development to 2028, will be of particular interest to Parish Councils
- Parish Clerks will soon be receiving news from the NPA about enhancements to the on-line consultation process for planning applications. A new 'Consultee Access' facility will be trialled to work alongside existing public access arrangements. In the future, Parish Councils (and other statutory consultees) will be able to receive details of all applications in their parish directly into a personal 'in tray'. Parishes will then be able to attach documents as part of their comments as well as typing a response into the appropriate box as now. Consultee comments would then be swiftly made available for public display as well as receiving early consideration by planning officers. All these enhancements are to be tested by a number of Parish Councils across the National Park (including Petersfield Town Council) and a number of training workshops will be available so that parish councillors and clerks can learn how to use the new opportunities effectively. Dates of the training workshops (some to be held in the EHDC Council Chamber at the end of March and during April) will be included in the letter to Parish 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. 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 South Downs is overseen by the Western Area team based at the Queen Elizabeth Country Park. They have been busy over the last period on a wide range of projects including habitat restoration work on chalk grassland under the nationally funded 'Nature Improvement Area' with local farms and organisations such as Butterfly Conservation and Natural England. It has also supported the installation of over fifteen new open access points by removing stiles and replacing them with easier to use kissing gates. Further work has included tree and hedge planting and support has been given for a new community orchard in Sheet. With spring around the corner we await the first of the adders which will be tagged in pioneering work by the Queen Elizabeth Country Park Volunteers Rangers funded by the South Downs National Park Authority 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
- 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
- The South Downs Volunteer Rangers continue to be busy with projects across the district and their work was featured in a half-page article in the Petersfield Herald on 18th January. If Parish Councils know of anyone who may be interested in becoming a volunteer please encourage them to contact the National Park. It's a great way to meet people and see the landscape. Training and clothing can be provided. People should contact Dan Oakley: 02392572619, dan.oakley@southdowns.gov.uk

Other information

- Guidance about the current range of Community Planning tools, techniques and plans is now available to Parish Councils and community groups. Designed to help communities decide whether to undertake work on a new Neighbourhood Plan or whether to focus on Parish Plans, Village Design Statements, Local Landscape Character Assessments or other plans, the guidance is available in draft format from Chris Paterson, the National Park's lead officer for communities. Chris can be contacted on 01730 811766 or chris.paterson@southdowns.gov.uk
- Free advice is now available to people who own woods across the National Park to help them manage their land to support wildlife and the local economy. The South Downs Forestry Partnership has been created by the NPA in conjunction with the Woodland Trust, the Wildlife Trust and the Forestry Commission. There is more tree coverage in this National Park than in any other in England or Wales, varying from ancient yew forests to modern plantations – and nearly half of the woodland is classed as ancient or semi-natural. For more information contact Nina Williams at nina.williams@southdowns.gov.uk or visit <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/looking-after/woodlands/woodland-management>
- Reactions to the NPA's 'State of the Park' report continue to be very positive. The report provides a 'baseline' position about current conditions in the National Park to enable the NPA and partners to measure the impact of the Management Plan (and other factors) in the years ahead. The report contains a wealth of data and it provides links to more comprehensive sources. It can be found on-line at <http://snpr.southdowns.gov.uk/files/default.html>

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.

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4th March 2013