

## **SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK**

### **Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 11<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

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.

As Parish Clerks now receive monthly Highlights of SDNPA work, my notes can probably be shorter than in the past. The NPA's Highlights note is not an exhaustive list of achievements, but selects some of the projects that the Authority and its partners are working on.

To complement those briefing notes I will focus on a number of issues under the following headings:

- Planning
- Supporting the rural economy
- Travel and tourism
- Helping local teachers and schoolchildren
- Local contacts.

#### Planning

- Following the series of parish and town council workshops in the autumn, the verification of data used in the Settlement Hierarchy assessment and the confidential consultation on SHLAA sites (Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment), the NPA's work to produce a draft version of the first ever Local Plan for the South Downs continues on timetable. A draft version of the plan, including housing allocations, is due to be published in September when all parishes will have another opportunity to comment and influence the emerging policies
- In parallel with work on the Local Plan, the NPA is also assisting over 40 parishes with the development of Neighbourhood Plans. A recent workshop for all interested parishes focussed on the site selection process for new development that Neighbourhood Plans should follow and an Independent Examiner provided feedback on some of the pitfalls that need to be avoided in order to produce an acceptable plan
- In Development Management, the NPA continues to win a number of significant Planning Appeals in East Hampshire and elsewhere across the National Park. Success in relation to an appeal against the Authority's decision to refuse planning permission for 230 dwellings at The Causeway in Petersfield is one of the more recent decisions
- Following representations to the Secretary of State, the National Park was successful in getting some changes made to the Government's proposals for reforming Section 106 agreements which, it was felt, could threaten the provision of affordable housing in rural areas. Changes to the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) have introduced a mandatory minimum size threshold for residential sites, below which no affordable housing can be secured. The threshold is described as "10 units or less, and which have a maximum combined gross floorspace area of no more than 1,000sqm" and excludes rural exception sites. NPPG Paragraph 17 allows SDNPA to introduce a lower threshold of 5 units or less with a caveat that "local planning authorities should only seek affordable housing contributions from developments of between 6 and 10 units as financial contributions and no affordable housing units on site."

### Helping the rural economy

- After a tough bidding process, the Government has selected parts of the South Downs to be one of eleven proposed Food Enterprise Zones (FEZs) – designed to make it easier for food and farming businesses to expand. The Environment Secretary, Elizabeth Truss, made special mention of the South Downs when announcing the proposals. The South Downs initiative will be designed to make it simpler for dairy farmers to reuse farm buildings for production or to set up farm shops to sell their produce to a local market – boosting their businesses, the local economy and the National Park as a whole
- The timing of this award is particularly good as the NPA is already working with farmers and food and drink producers to create a new local food directory and associated support network. The South Downs Food Portal will be a one-stop resource for everyone with a passion for local food and drink from visitors to producers, wholesalers to pubs, restaurants and bars. The portal will be launched after the May elections
- The National Park Authority has recently completed a series of farmers' breakfasts, culminating in a very well-attended meeting at the Langrish House Hotel near Petersfield last month. Amongst other things, the events were designed to help farmers and landowners identify future grant funding opportunities. Feedback has been very positive although there was frustration at Defra's failure to finalise the details of the new countryside stewardship scheme. Issues raised will be taken up with Defra and Natural England.

### Travel and tourism

- A new campaign encouraging people to look differently at the National Park and think about their journey as part of the adventure has recently been unveiled. With the National Park getting more than 46 million day visits each year it won't stay a special place for long if they all drive to the same places. This new 'Get a Fresh Perspective' campaign is targeting some of the surrounding urban areas and is part of a long-term strategy to encourage everyone to think differently about how they visit. By discovering new places, supporting local businesses and thinking about the journeys as part of the adventure, the aim is to reduce impacts on the National Park. Other parts of the NPA's Local Sustainable Transport project are also aiming to generate a modal shift onto trains and buses and to make cycling more attractive for residents and visitors
- Work to embed the 'Our Land' and 'Sense of Place' tools continues with tourism service providers – helping to build greater knowledge and understanding of the offer and qualities of the National Park for those that provide visitor facing services
- A recent review of visitor accommodation, produced to help with the preparation of the Local Plan, provides an insight into the quality and location of existing accommodation, identifies localised pressures and specific opportunities for improvements
- The South Downs Local Access Forum is being consulted on Hampshire County Council's Countryside Access Plan for the period 2015-2025. Parish Councils also have the opportunity to comment (by 31<sup>st</sup> march) and the document is available here: [www.hants.gov.uk/access-plans](http://www.hants.gov.uk/access-plans)

### Help for teachers and schools

- Another inspiring event is taking place to engage local teachers in outdoor learning opportunities across the National Park. Over 100 teachers from scores of local schools and 30 outdoor learning organisations are taking part with a wide range of practical sessions

- This event is part of the expanding 'Learning Zone' which is available via the NPA's website, helping all the schools in and around the National Park via an on-line portal for teachers and pupils. Designed to offer resources and ideas for many parts of the curriculum, the initiative 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/>

#### Local contacts

- Natalie Fellows the Planning Link Officer for Hampshire parishes, can be contacted via: 07872 410442 and [natalie.fellows@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:natalie.fellows@southdowns.gov.uk)
- The Authority's Western Downs team, based at the Queen Elizabeth Country Park, acts as a 'first stop shop' for communities and land managers, providing advice and support towards achieving the national park's 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 Nick Heasman, our Area Manager, on [nick.heasman@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:nick.heasman@southdowns.gov.uk) or 02392 571381

Finally I will mention that many Parish Councils have responded to the NPA's request for 'letters of support' for the potential application for International **Dark Skies** Reserve status – and individuals can also register their support and Parish Councils may wish to promote this initiative. Over 1,000 pledges were made during 2014. Details are available via <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/looking-after/dark-skies>

*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*  
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