

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 10th September 2014

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.

South Downs National Park Local Plan

Following the well-attended workshop meeting for Parish Council representatives earlier in the year and the subsequent consultation exercise on options for the National Park's first ever Local Plan, work is now taking place to produce the contents of the Preferred Options for the Local Plan so that more detailed public consultation can take place in spring 2015.

Parish Councils will, again, get special opportunities to take part and to help shape the Preferred Options, including the development of all the important policies, with a number of workshops taking place over the next few months and Councils being encouraged to feed back comments and confirm data.

This will be an important stage in developing the contents of the new Local Plan and it is hoped that Parish Councils will grasp the opportunity to take part. Items likely to be explained / discussed at the workshops include work on a Settlement Hierarchy across the National Park and feedback from the Authority's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) process – including the role that this may play in identifying potential sites for development in the Local Plan.

There will be three workshops for Parish Councils:

- one in Hampshire in the evening of Wednesday 12th November (venue to be confirmed)
- one in West Sussex in the evening of Thursday 23rd October (at the South Downs Centre in Midhurst) and
- one in East Sussex in the evening of Tuesday 4th November (venue to be confirmed)

Councils will be able to book places on any of the workshops so as to be able to choose a convenient day / date. Parish Clerks will have already received this information from Chris Paterson (chris.paterson@southdowns.gov.uk) at the National Park Authority but the events are being arranged in conjunction with the District Associations of Parish & Town Councils who will also be circulating the details and encouraging attendance.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

Following the consultation about the Preliminary Charging Schedule for the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) earlier in the year, all comments are now being examined in detail so as to ensure that the best possible evidence is available for the next stages. The 'Draft Charging Schedule' for the Authority's CIL will be published for consultation alongside the Preferred Options Local Plan in 2015. The National Park Authority is currently seeking input from County Councils and Strategic Service Providers (NHS, Environment Agency etc) on the Infrastructure Delivery Plan so as to add strategic projects onto the Parish input received over preceding months. In due course the final version will be submitted to Government for examination in Spring/Summer 2015. If Parishes have any queries on any of these matters, please contact Gareth Giles via gareth.giles@southdowns.gov.uk or 01730 819261.

Other planning issues

At meetings in June, the National Park Authority and EHDC formally adopted the East Hampshire Joint Core Strategy, setting out the spatial vision, objectives, development strategy and policies for the period 2011-2028. The plan covers the administrative area of East Hampshire District Council including the area of the South Downs National Park Authority that lies within the District.

This document is now a very important consideration in all planning applications in the area. It replaces some parts of the East Hampshire District Local plan of March 2006 whilst re-affirming other parts of that plan and it can be viewed via this link:

[http://www.easthants.gov.uk/ehdc/formsfordownload.nsf/0/68B798F4E62FE61680257D3A004820A1/\\$File/JCS+FINAL+VERSION+TEXT+ONLY+200814.pdf](http://www.easthants.gov.uk/ehdc/formsfordownload.nsf/0/68B798F4E62FE61680257D3A004820A1/$File/JCS+FINAL+VERSION+TEXT+ONLY+200814.pdf)

David Townsend, the National Park's '**Link Officer**' for any planning application matters in East Hampshire, is keen to encourage any Parish Councils to raise any issues about any planning applications with him, even if the decision is due to be taken by East Hampshire DC as part of the Park's delegated arrangements. David can be contacted on 02392 572672 and via david.townsend@southdowns.gov.uk.

Grants and other news

- More and more communities are taking advantage of grants available from the NPA's '**Sustainable Communities Fund**' (SCF). Parish Councils, voluntary groups, partnerships and others can apply for funding for non-profit making projects that bring environmental, social, economic or cultural benefits to communities within the Park.
- Recent awards include funding to help create and maintain a community garden in Sheet to enable a cross section of people of different ages, backgrounds and abilities to work together to produce fruit, vegetables and flowers in a project which involves skill-sharing and learning-by-doing so as to foster confidence, social interaction and community spirit; and a new cycling initiative based in Winchester which helps residents and visitors find safe, accessible routes around the city and out into the National Park. Family-friendly cycle hire, cycle maintenance facilities and shuttle services to various points in the National Park are involved to enable groups to travel further.
- **SCF grants** are available for up to 60 per cent of project costs from £250 to a maximum of £20,000. Enquiries can be made via Mark Rose (grants@southdowns.gov.uk or 01730-811755) and more information about the fund is available online at www.southdowns.gov.uk/communities/funding/sustainable-communities-fund
- The National Park Authority, working in conjunction with Hampshire County Council and others, has been able to support the **introduction of a number of new bus services** on Sundays and Bank Holidays over the summer months. To encourage more passengers on buses, much of the marketing has been aimed at new audiences who do not usually travel by bus
- The last section of the **Shipwrights Way** is nearing completion with the design of the missing link being developed through Woolmer Forest. Ideas for more safe routes for non-car users are being developed as part of a '**Writers Way**' project for parishes near to Alton. The project will draw on recent good practice experience from the Shipwrights Way and will address some long standing concerns about local rights of way

- Work by the South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service and the Wild Trout Trust (funded by the South Downs National Park Authority and East Meon Parish Council) is helping parts of the **River Meon** become a **better home for plants, fish, birds and invertebrates** thanks to a project to improve the flow of the river in the centre of the village. A semi-natural meandering channel has been created within the confines of the existing concrete lined channel and the work has created an environment that will enable chalk stream invertebrates and plants to thrive and provide a more favourable environment for fish such as small brown trout and bullheads
- Over 70 **barn owl boxes** have been built and installed in farmland habitats over the last few months – utilising rough grass field margins where the barn owl's favoured food (the field vole) lives. Amongst the most pleasing parts of this project is how happy farmers are to engage with the National Park's Rangers to have boxes installed. It is often the classic situation where farmers really want it to happen, but never have the time to make and put up boxes themselves. The project provides an opportunity for Rangers to liaise with land managers and farmers, building relationships with other forms of support and guidance
- Teams of volunteers have tackled about 4 kms of the **River Rother** this year, trying to eradicate Himalayan Balsam (an Invasive Non Native Species of plant that invades water courses) in the upper catchment area. In some places the abundance has been decreased by over 95% by cutting the plant just as it goes to flower, before it starts setting seed. The hard work has shown what can be done; but controlling this invasive plant will inevitably be a long term process.
- **Plans to restore and reunite areas of rare heathland** in the National Park have received initial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund enabling important habitat surveys to be undertaken and support from local organisations in Hampshire and Sussex to be coordinated. If an application for a full grant to carry out the project were to be successful the five year project would improve the quality and size of heathlands in the South Downs, and create wildlife corridors and 'stepping stones', allowing animals to move between them. The project covers a large area between Woolmer Forest near Liss, and Wiggonholt Common in the east, and from Black Down near Haslemere down to Midhurst Common.
- A number of these innovative projects are overseen by **the Park Authority's Western Downs team** based at the Queen Elizabeth Country Park. The team 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 or 02392 571381

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 September 2014