

## **SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK**

### **Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 6<sup>th</sup> September 2017**

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 and others now receive copies of the new SDNPA e-Newsletters (*South Downs News*), my notes can be shorter than they were initially. People can sign up here to have the [newsletter delivered to their inbox](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-publications/south-downs-news-the-newsletter-for-the-national-park/) 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 recent editions of South Downs News I will provide information about the following:

- Update about the South Downs Local Plan
- Workshops for Parish Councils
- Health, well-being and walking
- Brexit, Farm Clusters and the Future of Farming
- Liaison with other important partner organizations
- Update about A27 highways schemes
- National Park Communications
- Other practical help
- Local contacts.

#### **Update about the South Downs Local Plan**

Good progress continues to be made on the first ever plan to cover the National Park in its entirety. The 'Pre-Submission' version of the Local Plan was approved for consultation by the National Park authority on 11<sup>th</sup> July and consultation will take place during September and October – including special events for Parish Councils (see below).

The Local Plan aims to set a framework for good planning, with an emphasis on the landscape, caring for views and night skies, supporting the local economy, promoting recreation, enabling affordable local housing, and making sure that green spaces are properly valued and cared for. Further details can be found via this link: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/national-park-local-plan/>

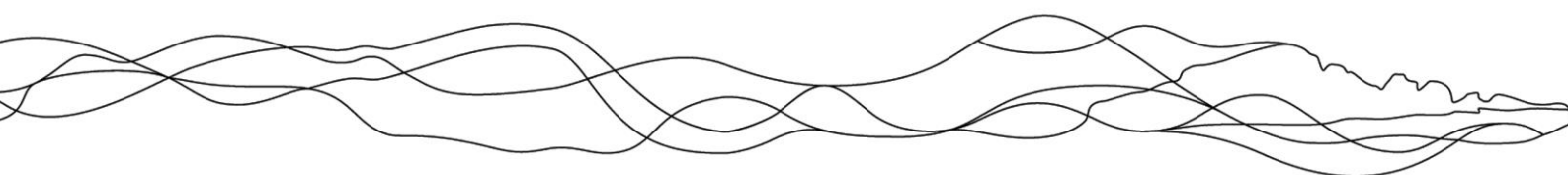
Comments received during the consultation will be dealt with by a Planning Inspector in the Examination process. It is hoped that many Parish Councils will write to the Inspector at that time to express their support for policies in the plan. After the Planning inspector has produced his / her report about the Examination, it is anticipated that the Local Plan can be adopted in mid-2018.

#### **Workshops for Parish Councils**

The SDNPA is arranging a series of workshops to explain the Pre-Submission South Downs Local Plan consultation. The workshops will also cover a presentation of the review of the South Downs Partnership Management Plan and Community Infrastructure Levy.

The SDNPA runs two of these workshops every year, and there is a workshop held in each county. On this occasion, invitations are also being extended to district and county councillors as well. A high turnout is expected and places will be limited due to the venues.

The dates, times and venues of each of the three workshops are as follows:



- 27 September, Hampshire Workshop, Festival Hall, Petersfield (6.30pm – 9.30pm)
- 4 October, West Sussex Workshop, South Downs Centre, Midhurst (6.30pm – 9.30pm)
- 10 October, East Sussex Workshop, Lewes Town Hall (6.30pm – 9.30pm)

## Health, wellbeing and walking

The National Park will be trying to play its part in the promotion of public health and sustainable tourism. A recent report from Public Health England estimated that four out of ten 40 to 60 year olds do not even manage a brisk 10-minute walk each month, that one in six deaths are linked to inactivity and that just one brisk ten minute walk a day reduces the risk of early death by 15%.

A recent Department for Transport survey revealed that a fifth of people only take a walk of at least 20 minutes once a year and that the population as a whole covered an average of only 95 miles by foot in the year (excluding very short walks): a reduction of 19% over the last 14 years. It appears that we are becoming an increasingly sedentary nation and the cost of this is being felt in the health service, in pollution of all kinds and in increasing social isolation. But walking can provide benefits beyond good exercise, it also joins up places and people. Details of the DfT survey can be found here: [Department for Transport's annual national travel survey](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/department-for-transport-annual-national-travel-survey).

The Park Authority is arranging a major 'Health and Wellbeing' conference on 11<sup>th</sup> October to explore the roles that National Parks can play in encouraging more people to explore the countryside and, potentially, extend their lives as a consequence.

Many communities already organise 'Walking for Health' initiatives, recent SDNPA walking guides can be found here (<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/walking/>) and information about the South Downs GeoTour initiative can be found here: <https://www.geocaching.com/play/geotours/south-downs>. More details about the recent Public Health England report can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/6-million-adults-do-not-do-a-monthly-brisk-10-minute-walk>

## Brexit, Farm Clusters and the Future of Farming

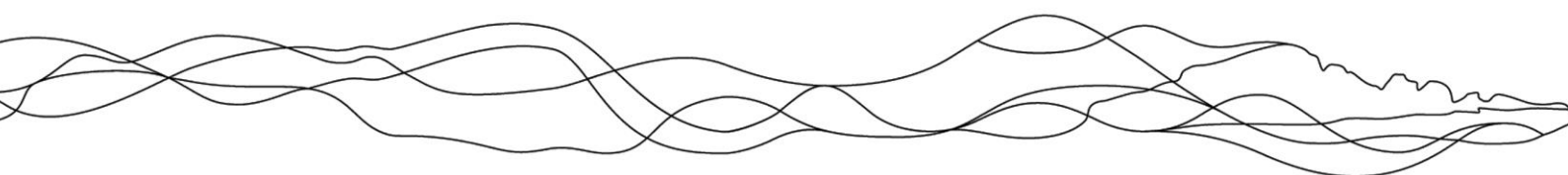
All the National Park Authorities in the country will be keeping an eye on the progress of the [European Union \(Withdrawal\) Bill](#) (the "great repeal Bill") to see if all existing environmental protections are brought into domestic law, as the Government has pledged, accompanied by the institutions necessary to enforce them. The SDNPA will be taking a particular interest in the new system of agricultural support post-Brexit which is a complex subject but one which will have a significant impact on the landscape of the National Park.

The SDNPA Farm Clusters now cover 60% of the National Park and will be used to pilot new ideas for the future of farming. A series of workshops for farmers have focused on two main aims:

- to identify the strategic priorities with regard to the future of farming in the National Park subsequent to the UK exiting the EU and
- to consider the opportunities for piloting options for a new agri-environment scheme, once the current system is no longer relevant.

The workshops were well-received by the many farmers who attended and will help to shape potential options for discussions with Defra.

As the Secretary of State has recently suggested, there is growing interest from farmers for a new system of agricultural support that puts environmental protection and enhancement first. There may be ways of embracing some of the principles of Natural Capital which have perhaps been most clearly explained by the environmental economist Professor Dieter Helm, Professor of Energy Policy at Oxford and the independent Chair of the Natural Capital Committee. A video by Professor Helm



which succinctly encapsulates Natural Capital (and which is well worth watching for about fifteen minutes) can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsLg2fOZFTs>

### **Liaison with other important partner organisations**

The National Park Authority is aware that each of the County Councils (Hampshire, West Sussex and East Sussex) face further financial cuts and is, therefore, endeavouring to work closely with them to point out the importance of countryside services, environment, Rights of Way and other aspects of their business to the National Park, as well as the potential perverse consequences of reducing or charging for other services.

The NPA has also been holding a series of meetings with the three water companies whose operational areas include parts of the National Park. These businesses are important stakeholders in the delivery of the Partnership Management Plan. Apart from the impact of any planned infrastructure for water treatment or storage, they have interests in changes in agricultural practices which improve water quality in the chalk aquifer and in the quality and flow rates in rivers. There are also opportunities to work together in sending water efficiency messages to households, businesses and developers.

### **Update about A27 highways schemes**

The National Park Authority continues to take part in Highways England consultations about proposed schemes to increase the capacity along the A27. There are currently consultations about a number of potential improvements, including bypass options at Arundel and junction improvements at Worthing and Lancing.

The SDNPA is making it clear that all public bodies, including Highways England, must have regard to the purposes of National Parks as they go about their work. National planning guidance states that 'major development' (which would include building or widening trunk roads) in a National Park is unacceptable unless there is an overriding national interest and no alternatives are possible.

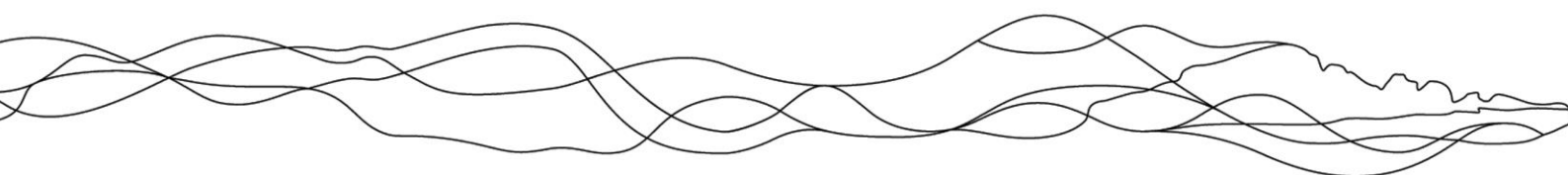
This is still, potentially, a major piece of work for the NPA as all the routes proposed at Arundel would go through parts of the National Park and the Authority will be assessing their relative impacts. The SDNPA has a clear [position statement on the approach it will adopt to all proposals for upgrading sections of the A27](#)

### **National Park Communications**

As well as the latest version of the SDNPA's e-Newsletters (*South Downs News*), a new edition of 'Southdowns View' is now available. This is the first time that a separate Autumn / Winter edition has been produced, enabling attention to be drawn to more events including next February's Dark Skies Festival. This edition of 'Southdowns View' also includes a double page spread introducing the UK's 15 National Parks: a very timely feature as the SDNPA will be hosting their biennial conference in October. The intention is to produce two editions a year in future to provide year round information on events and news information.

The SDNPA's "Annual Review", which highlights key achievements for 2016/17 has been published and is available on-line via: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/SDNPA-Annual-Review-2016-17.pdf>

The South Downs 'Discovery Map' is also proving popular, providing guidance about things to see and do in the National Park. There's something for everyone from culture vultures to nature lovers, young and old. Here you'll find cycle rides, walking routes and attractions. Simply filter by what you're after and start planning your adventure: <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/plan-a-visit/getting-around/discovery-map/>



## Other practical help

Since my last report (in June) members of the Voluntary Ranger Service have been involved in hundreds of further practical tasks providing thousands of days of volunteer effort and helping to look after the national park. Rangers have:

- released over 250 more water voles into the upper reaches of the River Meon, completing the programme of releases from source to sea. This has been the biggest ever water vole release in the country with over 2,500 released in a five year period. The river, one of only 200 chalk rivers in the whole world, has an incredibly precious habitat and the reintroduction of water voles should prove invaluable in the overall ecosystem as other mammals have gradually been devastated by predators
- worked with the East Meon Cub Group planting sedges, water mint, brooklime, water forget-me-not and marsh marigold into raised river banks created earlier in the year
- conducted butterfly surveys on a number of key chalk grassland sites, finding a number of important species including Brown Argus and Essex Skipper
- engaged with over forty 15-17 year olds through a trial of the National Citizens Service scheme which aims to give teenagers skills to make them more employable
- supported the Country Trust (a national educational charity dedicated to bringing alive the working countryside for children least able to access it) by helping to educate primary school children (some from deprived parts of Southampton and some with severe multiple difficulties) on farms
- worked with Historic England to complete Heritage At Risk surveys to monitor the status and management of sites.

The NPA's Sustainable Communities Fund continues to help partnerships and other not for profit organisations with projects which bring social, environmental, economic or cultural benefits to a community within the National Park. 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

With the departure of Natalie Fellows, the Planning Link Officer role for East Hampshire is being covered for an interim period of twelve months by Nat Belderson (Planning Link Officer) and Hannah Chapman (Assistant Planning Link Officer): contact details below. In the first instance, queries can be sent to Hannah, who will refer to Nat where necessary. [Hannah.Chapman@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:Hannah.Chapman@southdowns.gov.uk) and 01730 819270; [Nat.Belderson@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:Nat.Belderson@southdowns.gov.uk) and 01730 819307.

The Authority's Western Downs team, based temporarily at Empshott, 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 the Countryside & Policy Manager, Nigel James ([nigel.james@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:nigel.james@southdowns.gov.uk)) or Lead Ranger Elaina Whittaker-Slark ([elaina.whittaker-slark@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:elaina.whittaker-slark@southdowns.gov.uk)), 01730 819340 and 01420 538295 or mobile 07557 923842.

*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  
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September 2017

