

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Note for East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils Meeting 11th March 2020

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:

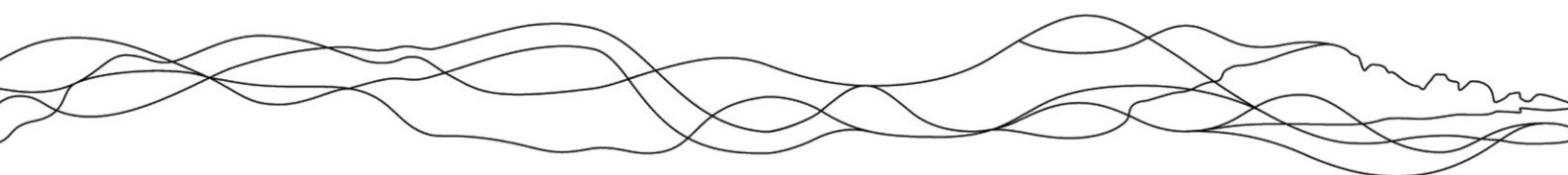
- The Partnership Management Plan
- The South Downs Local Plan
- Sustainable Construction SPD Consultation
- 10th anniversary activities
- South Downs Dark Skies Festival 2020
- Community projects
- Ash dieback and tree planting
- Help from horse-riders is required
- Engaging new audiences
- More free Youth Action Days
- Achievements of National Park Rangers and Volunteers
- Funding for local projects
- Local contacts.

The Partnership Management Plan

Following inputs from many Parish Councils, and other organisations, the South Downs Partnership Management Plan will be launched on Tuesday 31 March at an event which will mark the 10th anniversary of the National Park. The Management Plan will describe a range of outcomes to be sought in the period 2020-25 with a number of priority areas for action. The Plan identifies four overarching challenges for the next five years: the climate emergency; nature recovery; health & well-being; and economy, housing and infrastructure. Ten significant outcome areas are identified to address these challenges and it is likely that Parish Councils will be able to contribute to many (if not all) of them. The forthcoming round of parish workshops (May/June 2020) will devote time to this issue but, in the meantime, Chris Paterson is happy to talk with any Parish Councils with ideas to contribute and he can be contacted via chris.paterson@southdowns.gov.uk

The South Downs Local Plan

The National Park's Local Plan won a prestigious award from the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) for the environmental excellence of its contents recently and it will now be considered for another, national award. The Local Plan, adopted in July 2019, has replaced more than 1,000 overlapping policies that were in existence across the Park with 92 new policies covering all aspects of planning. The Plan covers the entire National Park for the next 14 years and, rather than being 'target driven', the policies in the Plan are based on the nationally-designated landscape. The Plan sets out measures to mitigate climate change and it also delivers vital "ecosystem services": the services provided by the environment, such as clean water and air, dark night skies and tranquillity. The plan can be viewed online via: www.southdowns.gov.uk/SDLocalPlan



Sustainable Construction SPD Consultation

The National Park Authority is currently consulting on a draft 'Sustainable Construction Supplementary Planning Document' (SPD). This SPD will provide guidance to support the implementation of new Local Plan policies such as Policy SD2 (Ecosystem Services), Policy SD3 (Major Development) and Policy SD48 (Climate Change and Sustainable Use of Resources). The SPD covers a number of detailed matters relating to new development including: energy and water efficiency, the use of low or zero carbon energy, use of sustainable materials, minimising waste and measures for adapting to climate change. The draft of the SPD is [available to view here](#) (with comments being sought by 5pm on 24 March after which comments received will be considered before finalising the document for adoption).

10th anniversary activities

2020 marks the 10th anniversary of the South Downs becoming a National Park when 1,600 sq kms of special landscapes with breathtaking views, unique heritage and hidden gems were designated for the benefit of the nation. The NPA will be arranging a number of special events, launches and activities to mark the anniversary, including the Dark Skies Festival in February, the launch of the new 'Partnership Management Plan' in March and a 'Discover National Parks' fortnight in April. Events will be held in town centres outside the park to encourage people to come and discover the National Park that is on their doorstep and more information about these can be found on the website:

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/events/discover-national-parks-fortnight/>

The National Park website will also be refreshed and should be accessible from 12 March.

South Downs Dark Skies Festival 2020

Now in its fourth year the South Downs Dark Skies festival (held over two weeks in February) attracted well over 3,000 people to its main roadshow events (including one in Petersfield) with many more attending smaller stargazing events held elsewhere. Designated as an International Dark Sky Reserve in 2016, the South Downs National Park is one of the best places in the UK to enjoy the sight of constellations, planets and distant galaxies and the Park Authority aims to keep it that way for future generations to enjoy. The Festival included fascinating talks about nocturnal wildlife as well as planetarium shows and other activities.

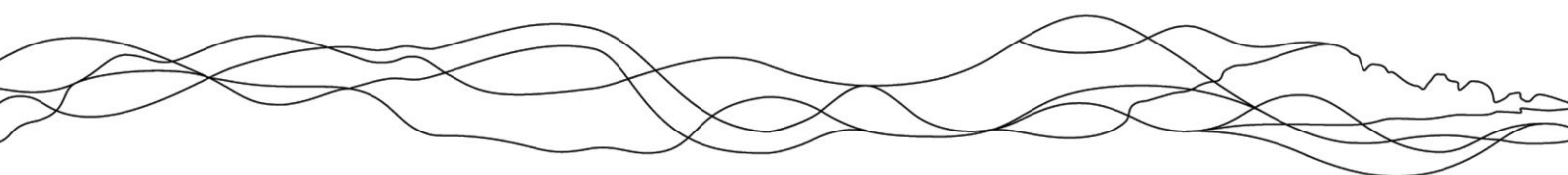
Community projects

Over recent months National Park officers have been working with a number of communities in East Hampshire to deliver a range of projects drawing upon S106 funding. Officers have helped parish councils identify projects which meet community needs and contribute to conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the National Park. These include schemes in Binsted, Chawton, Liss, Petersfield, Greatham and Selborne, involving footpath improvements, drainage schemes, improved signage etc.

Another series of projects is also in the early stages of development but might be of interest to communities in East Hampshire: projects will seek to identify highway improvement measures which are highways and landscape compliant, and which aim to tackle local community issues. Initially there will be five pilot schemes across the National Park to try to identify common issues and possible solutions. In the longer term it is hoped there will be a catalogue of highways solution schemes which parishes would be able to use to resolve local issues (potentially things like gateway signage, white line removal, signage decluttering, planting, parking solutions etc). For further details of any of these projects, please contact Chris Paterson via chris.paterson@southdowns.gov.uk

Ash dieback and tree planting

Ash dieback is beginning to change our landscape and so the National Park Authority is already working with landowners, partner authorities and conservation organisations to manage its impact and ensure



the retention of a healthy treescape for future generations to enjoy. There is more information about this issue here: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/woodland/ash-dieback-need-know/>. The South Downs Trust has launched an ambitious campaign to plant thousands of trees across the National Park and details are provided here: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/trust-launches-ambitious-campaign-plant-thousands-trees-across-south-downs-national-park/> The Langham Brewery, in West Sussex, is already supporting this 'Trees for the Downs' campaign recognising that no-one should take our countryside for granted and that trees are one of our most valuable natural assets: providing us with air to breathe, homes for countless wildlife species and one of nature's best carbon capturers. Langhams are hosting two fundraising music and beer festivals for the campaign: Live@Langhams on 18 April and MADhurst Live@ on 22 August. Both will be child and dog friendly! To find out more or to encourage people to donate to the campaign, see www.southdownstrust.org.uk/trees-for-the-downs/

Help from horse-riders is required

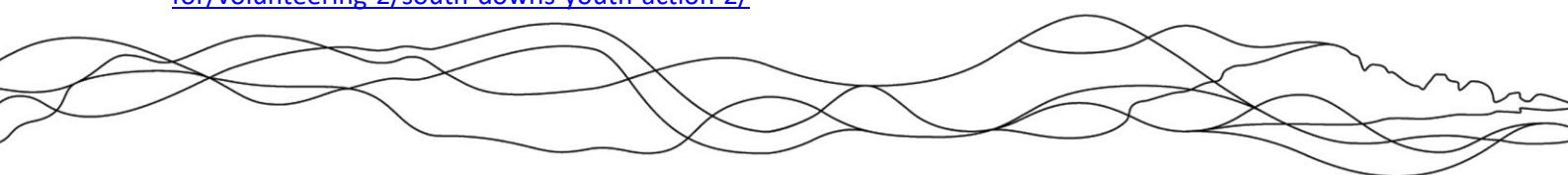
Horse riders are being called upon to help with the creation of a new series of handy downloadable guides for circular self-guided routes in Hampshire and Sussex. The National Park Authority is working with the British Horse Society to produce the guides – and now needs inputs from horse riders about where they like to ride and what their favourite routes are. It is acknowledged that the National Park offers some of the best lowland riding opportunities in the UK and the new guides will be designed to promote off-road networks and encourage people to get out and explore the great outdoors. Suggestions can be sent to Access@southdowns.gov.uk with the following details: start point (ideally with horsebox parking); the length of the ride; a short description of the route; and a simple map showing the route. The organiser, Allison Thorpe, is particularly keen to hear from riders who use the Queen Elizabeth Country Park or Harting Down but routes in other areas are also welcomed.

Engaging new audiences

As mentioned in my last report, the Western Downs Team has commenced a plan to widen volunteer appeal and engagement with all age ranges, socio-economic groups, ethnic diversity and geographical reach beyond the Park's boundaries. This has involved developing different types of volunteering and the success of these approaches is now evident in comments received and the work that has been completed. Although occasionally challenging, the new ways of working (with new groups of people) have been very rewarding and interesting. It has been quite humbling to see that a visit to Butser Hill, something that most of us would probably take for granted, could be such a major life experience for others. Planning is now underway for arrangements in 2020.

More free Youth Action Days

Youth Action Days are returning to the National Park for 2020 with an extended calendar of exciting events to give young people the opportunity to get hands-on experience in conservation. Following the success of the events last year, and to mark the National Park's 10th anniversary, Youth Action Days have been held during the February half-term and there will be more during the Easter and summer holidays. These Action Days are for anyone aged between 16 and 25 who is passionate about making a difference for the environment and is looking to learn practical skills to conserve and enhance the National Park. Daniel Greenwood is the SDNPA Volunteering Development Officer and he explains that "With the global climate change and biodiversity crisis so high on the agenda, we know that young people are incredibly engaged with environmental issues. Our free events are both fun and educational and give people a chance to get involved with the range of conservation activities happening in the South Downs National Park. It's also a great opportunity for young people to upskill, particularly if they are keen on a career in conservation – but the events are also about gaining confidence by talking to new people, making yourself proud as you give back to the planet and taking the time to relax and de-stress amongst nature." Details of events during the Easter and summer holidays will be available in due course, booking is essential and details will be available via: www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/volunteering-2/south-downs-youth-action-2/



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.

Over recent months the team has undertaken a wide range of activities, including:

- Working with Natural England at Old Winchester Hill, clearing scrub to enable chalk grassland restoration
- Working with HCC at Oxenbourne Down to open up scrub and restore chalk grassland habitat
- Managing vegetation in the River Meon to encourage a natural, meandering flow
- Removing trees to allow sunlight to reach the water elsewhere on the Meon to encourage more dappled shade which will allow a range of flora and benefit species such as water voles and eels
- Contributing to the Landscape Partnership in Selborne.

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. I continue to Chair 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 currently being covered by Nat Belderson although Jean Chambers (who has worked for SDNPA in the past) has recently been recruited and will take over this role in the coming months. In the meantime, Nat's contact details are:

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
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4 March 2020

