

## South Downs Network Executive meeting 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023

### Meeting notes

Present: Tony Whitbread (chair), Margaret Parren, Dan Osbourne, Chris Todd, Mike Tristram, Martin Small, Jill Sutcliffe, David Johnson, Phil Belden.

	Topic	Points discussed	Action
1	Apologies	Christopher Napier, Vic lent, Malcolm Smith, Graham Elvey, David Burnet, Sarah Abercromby, Andrew Hicks, Henri Brocklebank, Heather Richards, Grahame Joseph	
2	Minutes and Matters arising	The minutes of the last meeting were noted, any matters arising covered in the agenda.	
3	SDN Administration and networking	Administration currently undertaken by Smart PA, a commercial provider, unfortunately unable to continue due to SDN's lack of funds. SDN very grateful for the support of Velia Kurtzmann, at Smart PA. SDN in discussion with CPRE to see how admin can be covered in another way.  Use of the googlegroup increasing but recommended that members make even more use of it to interact with each other - a main benefit of membership, to network issues, information and requests.	
4	Membership and finance	Finance report submitted at the last meeting, with little change since. SDN still in credit, but finances limited (hence the need to end the Smart PA contract). Some members have not paid their yearly subscriptions. At present much admin time spent seeking subscription payments so if members could contribute promptly this would save significant administration expense.	
5	Transport issues	Transport for SE's Regional Active Travel Plan was raised, but currently no further information.	
6	National Park manifesto	Ahead of a general election, SDN working towards a manifesto for the South Downs complementary to SDNPA's plans. This comprises six generic asks, with more detailed points within each ask. Need to aim to be clear about the national versus local level and specifics of the manifesto. It could be that the generic asks reflect national objectives, plus detailed points with a local focus. This may work best in relation to support for farming, for example, with the generic approach of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) developed as bespoke systems for the SDNP, which could support key species, habitats, characteristics and heritage specific to the South Downs.	
7	Ministerial Statement on Protected	Though the (Protected) Landscapes Review ("Glover Report") was commissioned by Government in 2018 and published in 2019, there was a long period of silence, not issued until 2022. A recent ministerial statement has given hope, though th devil will be in the detail. Key Glover recommendations noted include	

	Landscapes'	strengthening National Park purposes to include climate change and a stronger duty on public bodies to deliver the purposes and Management Plan, 'power of competence' to enable private finance and a stronger emphasis on nature recovery. There is concern, with commitment and implementation continually put back and concern over "exemptions" to this public duty (National Highways, for instance, going against National Park purposes, as it is from delivering progress towards net zero CO <sub>2</sub> ).	
8	Planning issues	<p><b>Solar farms</b>  Proposal for a solar farm on the Brighton Downs, no details yet. These may become an issue across the SDNP. Many of these seem to be more a desire for local authorities to raise revenue than driven by sustainability criteria. In any case, likely to be a huge increase in the need for solar power (for existing need and also for power for electric transport and heating). Understanding needed of the criteria that would enable solar farms to be acceptable, linked to wider strategy for energy need reduction, including significant transport reduction (nb SDNPA renewable energy focus in its Local Plan). At present, most strategies built on the presumption of continual growth, for instance, in transport, whereas it should be about planning for a society with reduced need to travel.</p> <p><b>Oil drilling</b>  This was raised because of a resumption in drilling at Matterley, near Winchester. This was approved after appeal and, although a long delay, work now likely to progress. Winchester Action on the Climate Crisis (WinACC) have been actively involved in this and will have further information on their web site (<a href="https://www.winacc.org.uk/the-proposal-to-pump-oil-in-avington/">https://www.winacc.org.uk/the-proposal-to-pump-oil-in-avington/</a>). This has now become a generic issue with government committed to "maxing out" on oil and gas, effectively ignoring the climate change issues. Concerns about oil and gas at two levels: the general opposition to fossil fuels in principle; opposition because of the impact of a specific site (and knock-on impacts, such as transport).</p> <p>Horse Hill, Surrey: County Council approved oil drilling, but no detail on climate impact of "downstream" emissions in the EIA. Sarah Finch challenge taken to the High Court, on behalf of the Weald Action Group.</p> <p><b>Rampion II</b>  The works on land are likely to have a significant effect, yet public engagement poor, probably due to change of national rules regarding consultation (consideration of environmental effects now seems to have low priority).</p> <p>"Gravel Pit" at SDNP Planning Hearing, 26/9/23, alerted by Vic lent, but no details given. See webcast: <a href="https://southdowns.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/812362">https://southdowns.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/812362</a></p>	

		<p><b>Judicial review</b>  Threat to democracy with government reform (limiting) of Judicial Review process</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Partial removal of JR opportunity already passed into law last year <a href="#">see eg here</a></li> <li>2. Continuing frustration of govt over challenges in the courts against decisions which fail to follow proper responsible process, leading to ongoing pressure to further remove opportunities for judicial review of decisions.</li> </ol> <p><b>Permitted development rights.</b>  Government proposal to weaken these to enable buildings in National Parks to be repurposed as housing without the need for planning permission likely to effect not just old barns (major concern in Yorkshire Dales), but also buildings like stables, common in the South Downs. Fortunately, the proposed relaxing of pollution control on housebuilders was knocked out by the House of Lords (need to monitor whether this may be resurrected in some way).</p> <p><b>Infrastructure development</b>  Government proposals to speed development by shortening consultation processes. Proposals are probably illegal, currently, and in any case consultation is not the main cause of infrastructure development. Greater delays are caused by poor government policy and poor developer procedure.</p> <p><b>Biodiversity Net Gain</b>  A system which was to be announced in November now been postponed. With the imminent publication of the latest State of Nature report, likely to be grim reading, this is bad news.</p>	
9	Member reports	<p><b>Friends of the South Downs</b> are holding an event at 2pm on 28th and 29th October, at Sullington Manor Farm. This is a dramatic reading with music and song of Belloc's The Four Men with two performances, with Chris Hare leading a walk beforehand. Details: <a href="#">Public Events - Friends of the South Downs</a>. On behalf of the FoSD please circulate this to your members.</p> <p>JS reported a campaigner (Charlie Gardner) walk, 24/9-8/10 through Norfolk over the area that will be lost to the sea through sea level rise – wearing a snorkel to make the point! “Walking in water” flier included below.</p> <p>A new group – CPRE Brighton – has just been re-launched.</p>	

		Shoreham Wordfest currently underway. One event in particular – Footmarks, The Archaeology of Movement by Jim Leary, archaeologist, may well be of interest to members on 6/10/23: <a href="https://shorehamwordfest.com/">https://shorehamwordfest.com/</a> . The web page for WordFest also included below.	
10	Dates of next meetings	29th November 2023 All meetings will be held between 10am and 11.30 am unless otherwise stated.	



Walking in Water  
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