

Chairman's Report:

What did SDLMG achieve working with SDNPA in 2013-14?

South Downs Land Managers, with CLA and NFU colleagues, have continued to work for our National Park to be the best it can be for those who manage the landscape.

The South Downs Partnership Management Plan, published in December, took on board many of the comments that were made in our response. The profile of farming and land management was raised within the Plan's introductions, indicators and outcomes; notably, we secured recognition of the importance of continuing core farm infrastructure development as well as diversification.

Other inputs and consultation responses were given to the Authority as needed by Executive Committee members for example in South Downs Partnership meetings. A recent example being the Access Network and Accessible Natural Greenspace (ANG) report. The report's Green Infrastructure approach was supported but SDLMG emphasized that it needs to be balanced by taking more account of productive land management and biodiversity which are often not compatible with increased access; also by taking more account of the PROW network which was undervalued in the report.

Making a difference on the ground

We continued to press for an increase in the number of rangers delivering practical support on and off PROWs: in January the Authority underwent a restructure one result of which was an expansion of the ranger team.

Promoting what we do for the environment

We advocated early on that SDNPA should take on board the kind of scientific research evidence provided by, for example, the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust's Sussex Downs study, and help make this kind of information more accessible to land managers. We also emphasized the need for the Authority to help educate the public about the ways in which farming is essential specifically for the South Downs National Park's environment. The benefits of farmed habitat for farmland birds, particularly ground nesting birds on the Downs, are a strong message for us.

Many SDLMG members heard a presentation on the South Downs Farmland Bird Initiative in our 2012 General Meeting. In 2013 SDLMG entered into partnership with SDNPA and several conservation organisations for a relaunch of this Initiative: we have participated in the steering group and sponsored the website www.sdfarmlandbirds.com which will very soon be online – a useful one-stop-shop for information on ground nesting farmland birds of the Downs.

Three Officer Liaison Meetings were held with SDNPA in which a broad range of topics were addressed including: the Management Plan; the NPAs approach to planning including development of the Local Plan and CIL; action to reduce livestock worrying; NIA procurement; water resources and nitrate mapping; ways and incentives for SDNPA to work more closely with land managers at local level. The Authority values the communications and constructive dialogue with the land management community

enabled by SDLMG and continues to give an annual grant of £2,500 towards our costs. As a result of concerns expressed by SDLMG about grant schemes for practical projects by land managers, SDNPA have committed to considering a new approach to criteria for SCF and any other NPA managed grant schemes.

Opportunities for business communications and marketing

A new visual identity for the South Downs, expected to take an open and generic approach as advocated by SDLMG, is to be formally adopted by the SDNPA in June. Your Partnership members have contributed to this as has our Communications Lead Andrew Thomas. This is not as simple as a new logo, but will be a series of images and a theme that can be used by businesses if they wish to do so on their products, branding, signage, etc. SDLMG aims to develop a 'house view' relatively quickly after June.

SDLMG organizational activity

In the 2013 General Meeting there were two themed talks on Access including the Local Access Forum, and the Management Plan consultation. Two Executive Committee meetings were held in April and October. Our much appreciated Administrator Gwenda Teear resigned her role in November because of other commitments; it is not however goodbye to Gwenda since, being a land manager herself, she remains a SDLMG member. Taking this change together with the time pressures on our volunteer EC members and leads, the SDLMG Officers strategically reviewed our structure and identified a need for a part time Liaison Officer (also for a professional bookkeeping service).

Alison Tingley, who previously worked for the South Downs Joint Committee and then for the Park Authority as Rural Economy Strategy Lead, commenced as SDLMG Liaison Officer in January 2014. EC member Andrew Thomas agreed to be coopted as Treasurer and appointed Craig Anderson of B4Bookkeeping to administer finance and subscriptions, which ensures Alison's time can be used most productively.

One of Alison's responsibilities is to sustain and increase the membership numbers; another is to improve the quality of communications with members. Alison has updated the newsletter and website and is currently reviewing the SDLMG membership leaflet. Various events have been circulated to members and publicized on the website, such as Hampshire Farmland bird walk, West Sussex Rural Crime priority workshop and a meeting of Sussex Renewable Energy Forum; she set up a meeting with Forest Holidays and landowners in Arundel area to discuss plans for a Forest Holiday site. Alison has also drafted responses to consultations on behalf of the Executive Committee on the Draft Green Infrastructure Strategy, Local Plan and CIL.

Looking ahead to 2014-15

Topics currently planned for this year's main General Meeting include the Local Plan and Community Infrastructure Levy. Other active projects in which SDLMG members are involved include South Downs nitrate modeling Project steering group, and a strategy for the delivery of superfast broadband to the Park. We are currently working on responses to the Local Plan Options and CIL consultations and expect to submit SDLMG's organizational response in early May. There is still time for further input from members in this and the succeeding stages.