

## South Downs Land Managers Summer Meeting

19<sup>th</sup> July 2017 Ridgeview Wine Estate, Ditchling Common, East Sussex

William Wolmer, introduced himself as the new Chairman, and thanked Mike Tristram, the previous Chairman, for his hard work and guidance of the SDLM over the past 6 years. He welcomed Members to the 2017 Summer meeting, outlining the purpose and work carried out by the SDLM over the past year. Members were invited to contact either William or the Liaison Officer, Alison Tingley, with any issues that they wish the SDLM Executive Committee to raise with the SDNPA at future liaison meetings.

Andrew Lee, Director of Countryside Policy and Management for the SDNPA provided copies of the staff structure within his department, a map showing the ranger areas and a map of the Farm Cluster areas, of which there are 6 in the South Downs. These are all available on the NPA website.

Matt Dowse, Assistant Ranger in the Eastern Area, talked about the range of work carried out by Rangers in the SDNP that landowners may wish to get involved in.

The South Downs were designated in 2010 and became operational as a National Park Authority on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011. At 1,600 km<sup>2</sup> it is one of the largest National Parks in the UK, as well as the most populated, with 112,000 people living within the park and a further 2 million within 5 km, leading to huge recreational pressures. It is estimated that there are in the region of 46m visitor days annually.

Whilst chalk downland is one of the most iconic habitats in the downs it actually only covers 4% of the Park. By far the largest land use in the Park is farmland, with 44% of that being arable and 37% permanent pasture.

The National Park Authority is an independent body, funded through Defra and like all National Park has two purposes and a duty.

Purpose 1: To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.

Purpose 2: To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.

Duty: To seek to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities within the Park in pursuit of the purposes.

If there is conflict between the two purposes under the Sandford Principle, Purpose 1 takes precedence.

Matt gave examples of work carried out by Rangers in delivering Purpose 1, including working with landowners, volunteers and contractors to clear scrub on SSSIs and SAMs; reintroducing grazing on unimproved grassland, species focus work including South Downs Farmland Birds Initiative, bird counts, erecting barn owl boxes, working with foresters to open up rides to encourage Pearl Border Fritillaries, reintroducing water voles to the River Meon and the Wartbiter Cricket to sites in the Eastern Downs.

Purpose 2. The NPA staff attended 75 events last year and have introduced a campaign to encourage responsible dog walking – Take the Lead. Rangers were present at various hot spots during lambing time. Last year the SDNP was designated as a Dark Night Sky Reserve. Around 250 volunteers work throughout the Park undertaking a variety of work from litter picking to carrying out

access land surveys – looking at the infrastructure and where necessary replacing stiles etc. 4.4% of the Park is designated as Open Access Land under the CROW Act, 311 sites. The NPA is responsible for ensuring that Access Land is accessible.

Duty: Rangers undertake discussions with land managers on rural diversification; Rangers are closely involved in and help support many of the Farm Cluster Groups within the South Downs; each area office is to have an Apprentice Ranger post. Each Area has available a pot of money available for match funding projects such as fencing, providing water supply. Other funds available are Rampion Mitigation Fund, Champ Project and Heathland Re-united.

The meeting was then opened up for discussion and questions. There were two main areas of concern raised by Members, the first was around recreational pressure and in particular, livestock worrying by dogs and lack of toilet facilities and car parking.

Finally Andrew Lee informed members that the SDNPA would be running a series of workshops for landowners based on the Farm Cluster Groups at Winchester, Selborne, Arun and Adur and Plumpton to discuss the future agri-environment scheme, post Brexit. Farmer's views are being sought as to how a future scheme could be more locally accountable and more targeted. The NPA want to go back to Defra later this year with a proposal to run a pilot scheme tailored to the South Downs landscape

The meeting was followed by a tour of the Ridgeview vineyards and winery led by Esther Dawson.