

SOUTH DOWNS LAND MANAGEMENT GROUP

AUTUMN MEETING

held on Wednesday 28th November, 2012
at
Boxgrove Village Hall, Chichester, West Sussex

MINUTES

Executive Committee

Mike Tristram
William Wolmer
James Cooper
David Taylor
Nigel Clutton OBE
James Youatt
Andrew Thomas
David Ashcroft
Jonny Morris
Remony Moser

Executive Committee Apologies

Simon Ward
Sabrina Harcourt-Smith
Christopher Passmore OBE

Ex-Officio Members

William White
Robin Edwards

Approximately 50 SDLMG members attended the meeting. 23 apologies had been received. Mrs Margaret Paren (Chair – NPA) had also sent her apologies owing to illness.

Mr Tristram welcomed everyone to Boxgrove Village Hall, including the CEO of the National Park Authority (NPA) – Mr Trevor Beattie and our speaker – Mr Tim Slaney – the Director of Planning at the NPA.

Update on Events

Mr Tristram up-dated the audience on matters arising since the last meeting:-

1. **Recent Farm Workshops**

Thank you to Andrew Lee for organising these. Good information and ideas had been gathered from these. They will go into the emerging priorities which will form part of the new Management Plan for the National Park.

2. **Management Plan**

The the State of the Park Report, which informs the Management Plan, is now available to view on the National Park Authority website (www.southdowns.gov.uk). There has been a lot of input from SDLMG members. The Management Plan is currently being written and following further consultation through the spring it should be available for formal consultation in June\July 2013. Three SDLMG Executive Committee members have participated in South Downs Partnership discussions with NPA representatives to discuss what will go into the final Management Plan. A balanced view is being taken, including business growth in the Park area.

3. **Habitat Management**

SDLMG are working with the NPA to resolve some issues regarding funding of Land Managers to provide additional landscape improvements.

4. **Rural Crime**

Rural crime is a major concern to our membership. The NPA is striving to work more closely with the Police. This has two aspects: education, and police liaison. Our Education Lead, Jonny Morris will be involved in the education side. Mike Tristram, our Communities' Lead, is also in communication with Chris Paterson at the NPA – he has a determination to help make improvements in this area. He is talking to the Police and is arranging a meeting. If SDLMG members wish to attend, can they please inform Mike? Chris Paterson has also consulted our members on an improved categories' list for rural crimes in order to make it easier to report matters to the Police, and for police to know what are the rural crime priorities.

5. **SDLMG Newsletter**

Following the publication of the first Newsletter and questionnaire, member feedback has confirmed that the Newsletter needs to be shorter and more frequent. Our Communications Lead, Andrew Thomas, will be producing future editions. If SDLMG members have anything they wish to include, or any feedback, please could they e-mail them to us (sdlmg@southdownsland.com)

6. **Membership**

If current SDLMG members have friends\colleagues\neighbours who would be interested in joining SDLMG, please could they let either Mike or our Administrator know by e-mail? If any SDLMG members wish to become more involved in the activities of the Group, please could they let Mike know?

Mr Tristram then introduced our Planning Lead, James Youatt.

Mr Youatt confirmed that the Membership had been asked for any issues or problems they had encountered since National Park status. A large response was received. The meeting will try to address the broader spectrum of planning rather than deal with individual cases. Mr Youatt introduced our Speaker, Mr Tim Slaney.

Mr Slaney has been the Director of Planning for 8 months now. He was previously the Head of Planning and Development at the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, and before that worked in a number of areas both rural and urban, including an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and an area that became part of the the New Forest National Park.

Mr Slaney thanked the SDLMG for inviting him to the meeting and for their feedback on current planning issues. Mr Slaney's PowerPoint presentation is attached to the Minutes.

It is important to understand the National Park and its planning issues. The South Downs National Park is a very special area, with a diverse geology, population and a unique planning system. It is recognised the planning system needs to be consistent notwithstanding its set up. It has a cherished landscape which people are passionate

about maintaining and they have strong views in this respect. It is equally important to understand there is always another point of view. Over 100,000 people live within the National Park, and a further 2m live within 5km of its boundaries. The NPA are aware of and need to understand its changing landscape. It is a vibrant Park with economic pressures, and the planning policies need to relate to purposes, to ensure applications fit in. Mr Slaney is conscious of the conflicts of interests in the Park. The NPA have a duty to foster the social and economic well being of local communities as they go about their work.

Policy Formulation

In the NPA, it is the Management Plan that sets the tone for the South Downs National Park, including planning, and there is a need to understand where we are now. The recent workshops have helped to understand the pressures the NP need to address.

Key issues have included farming, water, climate change, rural economy and housing. The Management Plan will influence the future Local Plan. People will need to engage with the Management Plan. This will be available for public consultation in July 2013. The NPA have to give great weight to issues such as the conservation of the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and impact upon the landscape designation is the starting point in the National Park.

In order to formulate the planning criteria, the NPA have to work within the Localism Act 2011 (which promotes engagement and sharing with local communities), the National Planning Policy Framework and the DEFRA circular – English National Parks and the Broads. This provides policy guidance for all National Parks.

The Local Plan for the National Park will be formalised when the Management Plan is completed. They will also be working with existing planning policy 'host' authorities – Winchester, East Hampshire and Lewes on joint core strategies. The NPA will be working closely with other local authorities on Local Plans to ensure continuity.

There was an objective that the current Local Plan should be available to go out to consultation in March\April 2013, although Mr Slaney advised they may alter to ensure the Local Plan policies followed the Management Plan.

Development Management

The NPA is the planning authority, and is directly responsible for applications where the Local Authority has opted out of hosting arrangements (e.g. Arun). The National Park will also call in significant applications from all authorities to make the final decision.

There are 15 Local Authorities within the National Park, 11 of which host the planning development management process, with the remaining 4 handing all planning responsibility directly to the NPA. Of the 4,500 odd applications submitted since National Park status, the NPA have dealt with around 300.

In April 2012, a new IT system was installed to ensure everyone was working in the same way. Unfortunately, there were a number of start up issues and Mr Slaney conveyed his apologies. The situation is now stable and there should be no discernible difference in processing applications but all across the Park are now on a single system and can be tracked.

Local Validation

There had been public concern that the NPA are looking for too much information. This will be reviewed in January 2013.

Local Landscape Assessment

The NPA realise this could be overwhelming and it will be looked at.

Significance Test

'Significant' development applications will be called in by the NPA. The Link Officer will advise an applicant whether the proposed application is likely to be deemed major development, in which case it will almost certainly be significant and called in. Examples include housing developments, minerals and waste and renewable energy projects. Other developments that raise particular issues, especially if they affect the Management Plan key themes outlined above, may also be deemed significant and be called in. If in doubt ask your area Link Officer.

Consistency

In December 2012, a Service Level Agreement will be signed with the 11 hosting Local Authorities to ensure consistency of service. At the moment, the 11 authorities can impose legal agreements and conditions. It is essential that the wording is consistent on conditions applied to developments.

Shared Issues

Climate Change and Renewable Energy – these need to link closely with the Management Plan and there needs to be clarity for opportunities (e.g. hydro\wind\solar).

Farming Activities – the NPA is aware of peoples' concerns e.g. differing perceptions of viticulture or equine developments in the South Downs, and how people will respond to change in the landscape of the National Park.

Tourism – the NPA is aware that large numbers of visitors to the National Park are not aware of places to stay. Investment into encouraging visitors to use public transport etc. needs to be included in the Management Plan. Bed & Breakfast opportunities, conversion of farm buildings for visitor accommodation, camping etc. need to be encouraged.

Rural Economy – the NPA is aware that this needs to grow, and the landscape cannot be allowed to fossilise.

What do others do?

Rangers – the Rangers are an essential point of contact. They know a lot about the area and have had some planning training.

Link Officers\Strategy Leads – they work over 3 areas. They have good knowledge and expertise to call upon. They can help with planning and proposals. They offer a pre-planning service to call on although a formal pre-application planning service is to be introduced in Jan 2013 and the SDNPA will be promoting this.

National Park inhabitants\Agents - the NPA want to have discussions with people so that they can work together on the plans for the future. Estate Management Plans\Farm Plan setting the scene for the next 7-8 years will be helpful. The planning system needs to be able to help people and people need to be up front about what they want.

There have been interim problems with getting planning officers to take this view, and Link Officers can help in this respect. Rangers and Strategy Leads would also be able to help. **Questions from the Floor**

"Why are the Rangers not out in East Sussex".

Mr Slaney was surprised by this question. The Rangers have been very pro-active and the evidence is on the ground. Rights of way are now dealt with at County level, but this should not mean the Rangers are less visible. One issue that has arisen is that farmers and landowners need to get a better interface with the Rangers.

Estate plans – Mr Beattie confirmed that the Rangers can also work with the Local Authorities and Link Officers.

Mr Slaney confirmed that it is vital that the NPA and farmers / land managers understand the needs of the public and work together. The NPA and the group assembled owe it to the public to be open and transparent about their work and policies given the subsidies / grants we all receive. He thanked everyone for engaging at the workshops.

"Community Infrastructure Levy – what level of money will be taken and what will it be used for?"

The NPA is the Local Planning Authority and they will collect the money. Funds will be directed by the Management Plan and Local Plan to local councils and communities. The funds will need to meet the aspirations of the Management Plan and Local Plan, and be proportionate so as not to deter development. A number of companies will help with consultancy work.

"Estate Plans – the NPA views"

Feedback from Mr Slaney was positive and the realisation that the NPA must work with Estates. Planning Officers often "sit on the fence" and do not appear to support what private Estates are trying to achieve. Follow-up letters often do not reflect discussions at meetings. There needs to be a genuine system to support a genuine planning process. The NPA need to make policies clear, and Planning Officers are often concerned about community reaction. Evidence that Parishes and communities are behind proposals will help all and should be undertaken by planning agents / land managers / farmers as appropriate. The Management Plan and Local Plan need to show that the NPA will work with landowners and their agents, and there should be something in the system to help achieve this.

"Development in north-east Hampshire"

One SDLMG member expressed her concern about a huge development taking place in a quiet and beautiful part of north-east Hampshire. It would appear that the local community were not consulted. It started with a German Huff house, but now has supporting staff accommodation and art gallery. How does this fit in with the NPA policy? Why haven't people been involved in the planning process? How was it allowed to happen? Mr Slaney commented that a decision was probably made before the National Park was set up. He asked for further details.

"Too many policies for Estate Plans"

Concern was raised that there could be too many policies to adhere to. The NPA must remember that there will be many tenant farmers, and there will be things they will not be allowed to do under the terms of their tenancy. A firm of consultants from Oxford

have been engaged to advise the District Councils and Agents on planning. Every site will be visited, and all recommendations will be looked at by a Senior Planning Officer.

"Retirement Homes"

Some Estates would like to be able to offer retirement accommodation for long-standing employees. Would this be allowed on green field sites? A recent site in Hampshire was turned down as it did not fit the NPA criteria, even though it was on a bus route. Mr Slaney replied that if there was a good case for rural exception, it could be looked at positively. The rural exception would have to provide good evidence and be appropriately small scale.

"Change of Use of Land"

What view will the NPA take of people applying for the change of use of land adjoining their residential property to be taken out of agriculture in order to boost the residential property's value for sale? This will be dealt with under the host arrangement. It should not be allowed to take up good agricultural land. This is likely to come up in the Management Plan.

"Rural Economy – will it seek to protect small rural businesses?"

Mr Slaney confirmed that the NPA would be supporting them. There are approximately 1,000 small businesses in the National Park. There is huge potential for them to grow sustainably. They would look to keep them inside the National Park where they will often be more appropriate in the Park situation than large commercial estates. Every case will be looked at on its merits in terms of development. Small businesses contribute approximately £2bn to the economy and they need to be allowed to grow as they have potential for the future.

In order to protect small rural businesses, housing growth needs to happen but we also need protective policies regarding employment.

Mr Youatt thanked Mr Slaney for his time. The NPA wish to engage with SDLMG, and we as a Group need to get involved.

The following National Park personnel were present at the meeting and made themselves known:-

Trevor Beattie – Chief Executive Officer – Mr Beattie confirmed that he is very keen to hear from SDLMG members.

Andrew Lee – Strategy & Partnership Director. He confirmed that the key element is the Management Plan. The workshops have been very useful and big issues have come out of these, some of which are very practical. The NPA are also working with rural communities to get faster broadband.

Alun Alesbury – Planning Committee member. Mr Alesbury was appointed by the NPA to liaise directly with SDLMG. He would be happy to speak to members regarding planning issues.

Amanda Elmes – Learning, Outreach and Education Strategy Lead.

Alison Thorpe – Access & Recreation Strategy Lead. She is currently working on a transport funding project.

General Discussions

Transfer of Rights of Way

All Highways Authorities have taken back the responsibility for rights of way. West Sussex County Council has erected new signs, which include the wording "public way". This topic has been under a lot of discussion. The NPA will use volunteers on the South Downs Way, and confirmed they have 250 volunteer Rangers.

Communication

It has been hard for the NPA to engage with Parishes, of which there are 181 within the NPA. A postcard survey did not give a clear vision as only 1,000 were returned out of 110,000 inhabitants of the Park. The NPA are exploring other avenues for communication with people.

Planning Applications by Farming Community

Concern was expressed that Planning Officers do not understand or know enough about farming issues and will often use consultants. It would be useful to know how many people on the planning committees are involved in the farming community. Mr Slaney advised that it would be impossible to have an expert on every field on a planning committee.

Mr Tristram reiterated to the membership that they should tell the relevant SDLMG Lead volunteer, or himself, of any concerns they may have.

Mr Tristram closed the meeting thanked everyone for coming.