

SDNPA – SDLMG Meeting Minutes

Ditchling Meeting Room,
South Downs Centre, North Street, Midhurst, GU29 9DH
14:00 – 16:00
24 February 2016

Present:

Trevor Beattie (Chair)

Andrew Lee
Phil Belden
Chris Fairbrother
Jody Slater
Lucy Howard
Conal Stewart
David Doxford
Bruce Middleton
Sara Osman (notes)
Alison Tingley
William Wolmer

Mike Tristram (MT)
David Ashcroft (DA)
David Hill (DH)
Robin Edwards (RE)
Simon Ward (SW)
Christopher Passmore (CP)
David Taylor (DT)
James Cooper (JC)
David Uren (DU)
Sabrina Harcourt-Smith (SHS)
Stan Abbott (SA)

Apologies:

Margaret Paren – Chair (MP)
Nigel Clutton

William White
Andrew Thomas

1. Welcome & Minutes of last meeting

Trevor Beattie welcomed everyone to the meeting. The minutes of the previous meeting, held on the 29 May 2015, were discussed and found to be accurate. There were no matters arising.

2. LIFE+ integrated projects – Big Chalk

(This presentation will be made available to all members of the SDLMG)

Chris Fairbrother (SDNPA Landscape Strategy Lead) gave a presentation explaining the concept for a 'Big Chalk' LIFE+ and Integrated Projects (IP), which could address flood protection, water quality, biodiversity and recreation benefits for nine chalk Protected Landscapes in England. The SDNPA is working with the AONBs to put in a bid for technical assistance to be submitted in September 2016. This assistance would then help development of a full project plan over the following 12-18 months, with the aim to submit the final bid in 2018, so this is a long term project and will draw on the expertise of SDLMG

Chris answered questions from the SDLMG, including reassuring the group that the project aims to work closely with the water companies, although this is not needed at this early exploration stage. Chris explained that delivery of the project on the ground, for example on flood risk management, might include looking at strategic woodland creation and the use of a variety of precision farming techniques. The group discussed the enormity of the project and the challenge of working with other bodies which have limited resources. It was acknowledged that it was important to ensure that there would be capacity to deliver the project on the ground and to develop a long term chalk strategy.

3. Whole Estate Plans (WEPs)

(Electronic copies of the WEP Preparation Guidance document will be made available to all members of the SDLMG)

Jody Slater, SDNP Design Officer, gave out a draft copy of WEP Preparation Guidance documents. Jody summarised the background to WEPs and where they sit in the Policies of the SDNPA Local Plan Preferred Options document. WEPs enable Estates and Landowners to work in collaboration with the SDNPA to identify opportunities and threats, and facilitate pro-active solutions. WEPs can also help landowners identify areas that need support and may help support funding bids and planning applications, as they will provide evidence for need (i.e. housing for farm workers etc.). Although they will not guarantee funding or planning permission will be granted, they will enable planners and funders to understand the needs of estates and landowners more quickly.

The draft document aims to provide a process to help landowners develop a WEP and an action plan, and is open to consultation until summer 2016. Jody asked the group to give feedback to ensure that the document is useful and can work for the many varied size estates and landowners in the SDNP.

Questions raised included whether there was a standard length of time that WEPs should cover: Jody explained that this was flexible and would be different for each estate or landowner. It was agreed that some guidance on length might be useful, and suggested that the length of the SDNP Local Plan, which will run until 2032, may be a useful timeframe for some landowners when developing WEPs. The group also discussed the difficulties in defining what comprises an 'Estate' as they want the WEPs to benefit all relevant landowners, and Jody welcomed comments to help develop this definition. The SDLMG group welcomed the approach of WEPs

ACTION: All members of SDLMG to send comments on the draft WEP document to Alison Tingley to be collated and fed back to Jody.

4. Local Plan – responses

(This presentation will be made available to all members of the SDLMG)

Lucy summarised the feedback that has been received from the draft Local Plan Preferred Options consultation, outlining responses specifically relating to the agricultural policies: SD22 (4), SD46, SD47 and SD48. The SDNPA are pleased with the number, and detail, of responses from Estates and Land Managers which are very useful and will help to inform the final Local Plan. Lucy outlined the Sites and Settlements identified in the Local Plan Preferred Options, and which areas were working on Neighbourhood Plans.

A summary, and a verbatim list, of comments will be available to read on the Inovem website. LH to notify Alison Tingley when it is available, who will circulate the link. The timetable for the next stage of the Local Plan consultation is under review, however the next stage will focus on the soundness of the report, testing it against four areas set by Government: that it is positively prepared; that it is justified; that it is affected; and that it is consistent with national policies. The SDLMG will be advised when they can input into this stage of the process. MT suggested it would be helpful, where SDLM had commented on policies of importance to the group, for the SDLM EC to be given sight of the emerging response to our comments and where appropriate to provide clarification or further evidence, before the final version is taken to the next stage when only soundness can be further considered. LH agreed this would be useful, and will action.

Lucy addressed questions on the size of the document which made it difficult to process and comment on. This has been noted, and that the SDNPA were working on reducing any repetitive points and making the final Local Plan easier to use. The group also discussed concerns about the new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and its potential impacts.

Lucy agreed to provide answers on CIL to Alison Tingley to circulate to the group, specifically in relation to conversions of farm buildings.

ACTION: Lucy to forward a response on CIL to Alison to circulate to the SDLMG

5. South Downs Food

(This presentation will be made available to all members of the SDLMG)

Conal updated the SDLMG on the success of the South Downs Food portal, which has exceeded all but one of its targets in first 9 months, will meet all targets by its first full year and be on its way to achieve year two targets. There are a large number of events listed on the site as well as many producers, suppliers and places to eat local food, indicating that it is providing a needed tool, and it is believed that it may be one of the largest networks for local food in the country.

Networking events have been very successful and more are planned for the future, with cluster groups developing to enable better networking and support for local food businesses and suppliers. Current work is looking at the commercial future of the website to ensure that it funds itself, and looking at new areas to market local food, such as accommodation providers.

The SDLMG congratulated the SDNPA on the scope of the project and the success in achieving its targets. Concerns were identified that the definition of 'local' food is at variance to the Local Plan in the Farm Shop policy which were felt not ambitious enough. The group hoped the success of the South Downs Food website demonstrated a need to re-evaluate the figure for local food in the Local Plan.

6. Broadband, LEP/LEADER funding and CLT workshops

(Electronic copies of all handouts, and links to relevant website will be made available to all members of the SDLMG)

David updated the group on the following projects:

- **West Sussex Superfast Broadband** Gap-Funding opportunity has been extended until 17 April 2016. The SDNPA will be hosting a workshop on 17 March for anyone that is interested to find out more
- **Satellite Broadband Voucher Scheme** is available to businesses that have broadband speeds of less than 2Mbps. They should be applied for through the relevant county broadband programme for Hampshire, East Sussex and West Sussex.
- **Ofcom Mobile Coverage Checker:** <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/mobile-coverage>
- **Funding from LEPs and LEADER presentation** for businesses and community groups in the South Downs National Park, including information on Business Support via Growth Hubs, C2C Grants, Enterprise M3, EAFRD, LEADER funding for different areas in the SDNP, and LAGs (Local Action Groups).
- **Community Led Development** workshops on affordable housing are being run in conjunction with Action in Rural Sussex on 21 March (Hamsey) and 23 March (Pulborough)

7. Feedback from Farmers Breakfasts

The SDLMG agreed that the Farmers Breakfast workshops provided by the SDNPA were excellent. It was a privilege and a pleasure to have the opportunity to be able to have close discussions between key SDNPA staff and land managers. It was appreciated that there was a lot of very good quality discussion time alongside the themed talks.

It was noted that more farmers could benefit from attending the workshops and the group discussed how to promote the Farmers Breakfast workshops to others as they are a very valuable resource.

It was suggested that holding the events in February, outside the shooting season, might enable more farmers to attend. The SDLMG agreed that the format of the workshops worked well and agreed to write an article for the next SDLMG next newsletter to promote them wider.

ACTION: Alison to write an article promoting the Farmers Breakfasts for the next SDLMG Newsletter

8. SDNPA Update

SDNPA Budget: Trevor updated the SDLMG that the SDNPA is unexpectedly in better position than expected after the Chancellor's Spending Review. National Parks have a protected budget with a slight increase for inflation of 1% per year over next four years. SDNPA Members have decided to use this opportunity to use this extra budget to develop strategic projects and look at income generation to enable the SDNPA to become more resilient in the future.

Member Update: Defra is running the appointments process for the two Secretary of State vacancies on the NPA. Interviews have taken place and the SDLMG will be notified about the appointments as soon as we know

Restructure: Trevor updated the SDLMG on the current restructure taking place at the SDNPA, which is important to keep fixed costs down and lay the foundations for an organisation which can be less dependent on Defra funding. The current structure has enabled the SDNPA to create the Management Plan, and the new structure will focus on delivering it. The management structure at the top of the organisation will be slimmed down with fewer Directors and Heads of Team. The current Strategy and Operations Directorates will now be integrated into a new Countryside Policy and Management Directorate. This should not affect the ranger contacts that the SDLMG currently work with. Most staff remain but the structure will be different, and some job titles may change, for example a new Lead Ranger post has been introduced to encourage opportunity for career progression. Area Teams will have an Apprentice/ Assistant Ranger post and will be headed up by a single person covering policy and delivery. The new structure is expected to come into effect at the beginning of June 2016. Trevor reassured the SDLMG that skill areas such as forestry and water were still key and will be retained in the new structure,.

9. AOB

None

Date of next meeting: 25 May 2016 14:00-16:00

There being no further business TB closed the meeting at 15:57.