

South Downs Land Management Group

**SUMMER GENERAL MEETING**

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2013

At Coombes Barn, Church Farm, Lancing, West Sussex

**“What can the Park do for you?”**

Mr Tristram welcomed everyone to the Summer General Meeting, and in particular welcomed our guest Speakers:

Tim Squire	NPA – Rights of Way and Access Officer
Pete Currell	NPA – Partnerships Delivery Manager
Glynn Jones	South Downs Local Access Forum Chairman

29 apologies had been received from the Executive Committee, Ex-officio members, SDLMG members and National Park Authority members, in particular the Chair – Mrs Margaret Paren, the Chief Executive – Mr Trevor Beattie and Andrew Lee.

Mr Tristram explained the format the for the meeting. We will have 2 themed talks:-

Access

Becoming a National Park is potentially going to add to public interest in the Park, which can have benefits but also be detrimental. The NPA are trying to make it a positive move.

Management Plan

The draft Management Plan should be available for public consultation within the next 5 days. The NPA will be telling us how they will continue to engage with the land management community.

Our Access Lead, David Taylor introduced Tim Squire and Glynn Jones.

Tim Squire began by confirmed that Mrs Margaret Paren was re-elected as the Chair yesterday. Norman Dingemans was elected Deputy Chair.

Mr Squire began his presentation with an overview of the NPA role:

- there are many ways of access within the Park and there are 3,300kms of rights of way in the Park – 57% = footpaths; 37% = bridleways; 5% = restricted bye ways; 2% = unrestricted bye ways
- The South Downs National Park has a small proportion of access land (4.4%) in comparison to other National Parks. Exmoor = 25%; Yorkshire Dales = 62%;
- there are 311 separate sites, together with downland and common land. There are also Country Parks – e.g. Seven Sisters. Forestry Commission land

(mainly the western part), National Trust land and private estates and land make up the rest.

- access land is the responsibility of the NPA. It is split into 3 different parts:-
  - common land
  - dedicated land. The Forestry Commission have dedicated their land. Brighton & Hove City Council and Worthing Borough Council may dedicate some of their land. This will result in this land being open to the public in perpetuity
  - open country – mountain\moor\heath and downland.
- our National Park consists of fragmented land. The NPA can enter into agreements with landowners regarding the positioning and type of gates in order to allow access to the general public. Access is important because a lot of the land is fenced. The NPA has spent a lot of time mending and installing gates. Last year they replaced 20 stiles with kissing gates.
- a lot of time has been spent clearing scrub. They have been working with a group of volunteers that has equated to 1,800 volunteer days spent on this.
- The NPA work with the relevant local authorities regarding decisions on access land and implement restrictions where appropriate e.g. dogs to be kept on leads between March-July to protect nesting birds. Landowners can apply to the NPA to implement restrictions on their land e.g. during the shooting season or land that is vulnerable to fire.
- the NPA will also be working with Natural England on conservation projects.
- the Local Highways Authority manage their highways and the NPA are working with them, in order to maintain a high quality network of access. They are promoting routes e.g. Meon Valley trail and a project at Falmer.
- the NPA have taken a lead role in the South Downs Way and are involved with local rangers and contractors.
- the NPA appoint the Local Access Forum, which is a statutory body. It is an independent body appointed in April 2011. The LAF give advice to the NPA, DEFRA, Natural England etc. They can appoint up to 22 members and currently have 17. Glynn Jones is the Chairman.

Mr Squire introduced Mr Glynn Jones. Mr Jones gave a brief résumé of his background:

- he spent 32 years working for the National Trust, firstly as a Ranger and then as a Countryside Property Manager. He has lots of experience of balancing appropriate access with the needs of farmers and land managers.
- he explained that the LAF does not have any powers, but offer advice to the appropriate bodies. There has to be a very good reason why their advice is not implemented. They try to give balanced advice and come up with recommendations helpful to everyone.
- they are not there to tell people what to do, but engage with people e.g. walkers\riders\cyclists\disabled people\farmers\landowners and their representatives.

- they have responded to consultations on forestry and its future and conservation projects. DEFRA regularly come to them for advice.
- they are working with the Environment Agency on the plans for work to the floodplain on the lower Arun.
- Network Rail are working with them regarding crossings that are no longer deemed safe. Accesses are under review to keep as many as possible open and safe.
- they are working with Local Authorities on a Rights of Way Improvement Plan relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- there are perceived conflicts within the countryside e.g. dogs and stock. They are working hard on this and will continue to do so. The NPA also needs to engage that people need to make a living within the Park.
- the South Downs Local Access Forum work with the four local authorities – Brighton & Hove, East Sussex, West Sussex and Hampshire. It is proving difficult to build relationships with them, as they all work in different ways. IT technology will hopefully make this easier.
- aware that the LAF need to get results on the ground to encourage people to attend the meetings.

Mr Tristram thanked Tim Squire and Glynn Jones for their talks and invited questions from the floor.

- (a) Concern was raised that it was perceived that it was a deficiency that our National Park has limited access land. This was a good reason why the National Park status was delayed, and we are totally different to other National Parks. Our land is also heavily farmed.

Mr Squire answered by saying that he was not trying to give that impression, but that it was a problem connecting areas up. There is no suggestion of making access areas bigger. Downland and heath land have conservation value. Our National Park also has the largest network of rights of way.

- (b) "Is there the facility to send along a deputy to the LAF meetings if your representative is unable to attend? Farmers are massively under represented."

The LAF are unable to appoint anyone. The NPA has to do that. However, someone else could come along but would be unable to vote. There has to be a balance of members on board. Observers can come along and speak if they are representing an interest.

**Action : Speak to the National Park Authority about this**

- (c) Stiles have been tried and tested and keep livestock secure. However, many have been replaced with kissing gates or swing gates. If these are left open, who is liable if an accident happens if stock get out or if the swing gates are blown open?

The Highways Authority will encourage the removal and make gates safe. Good self-closing mechanisms need to be looked into.

It is apparently a West Sussex policy to replace stiles with kissing gates.

- (d) It would perhaps be a good idea to go back to metal gates. LAF are aware of the problems and David Taylor is trying to address this in the LAF meetings.

Mr Tristram then introduced Pete Currell – the South Downs Partnership Delivery Manager, who would be talking through to process of the public consultation for the draft Management Plan.

Mr Currell began by saying that the National Park rights of way are in good condition and there is no intention to increase them.

The NPA has to produce a Management Plan, which is a Plan for the Park not the Authority. The NPA will draw from the Management Plan to produce and implement their own Plan as will Natural England.

The draft Management Plan will be out for public consultation within the next 5 days and will be available for 9-10 weeks. The NPA have been engaged with Parish councillors, stakeholders etc. for the past 2 years. They have also held workshops and met people individually so that people have felt involved and engaged with the process. They have also engaged with land managers and SDLMG who have advised accordingly. The SDLMG have been much more involved recently.

The workshops were independent of the NPA, which was appreciated. The first 3 workshops were held in 2011 and asked “What are the issues you face?” These were categorised into:-

- priorities
- less important
- not important

This helped to put together the draft policies.

The second set of workshops helped to put the draft policies together, and what needed to be changed, removed or amended. The results of the second workshops went to the NPA member workshops. Experts attended these to confirm what was valid.

The final policies will start to give direction to the Park.

The policies will fall into 6 sectors:

- farming
- forestry
- tourism
- transport
- learning
- outreach

A copy of the draft Farming policies is attached.

Other topics that emerged from the workshops as being highly relevant were:

- water sector policies
- landscape scale
- faster broadband
- education and learning\outreach events
- economic diversification
- housing

When the Management Plan has been adopted it will be the framework for 5 years. A new Management Plan will then be implemented for the next 5 years and so on. It will need to embrace peoples' needs moving forward.

SDLMG, together with the CLA and NFU will be involved in face to face discussions with the NPA before the Management Plan is implemented.

- agri-enviro schemes – the NPA are in discussions with DEFRA and are hoping for payments for implementing schemes.
- branding – this will be looked into to help people that produce local products with sales and promotions at local markets.
- local food markets – it is hoped to develop an infra-structure\guidance to support the Park to develop this.
- Nature Improvement Scheme – research is needed to improve for the future.
- learning – there are 650 schools in the National Park or within 5km of it. It is hoped to get a strategic project on the curriculum.
- best land management practices – investigate what other National Parks are doing.
- volunteers – the NPA are keen to work more with volunteers – information is on their website.
- Resource efficiency guidelines – e.g. renewable\water conservation
- the NPA want to continue to work closely with the SDLMG and improve the relationship and work.
- they have the e-mail addresses of approximately 200 farmers, and will be inviting them to look at the draft Management Plan and the on-line survey. The NPA will encourage everyone to take part, and want you involved. The draft can also be produced as a hard copy. If people do not respond, they will assume that everyone is happy, when this may not be the case.

### Questions from the floor

*"How long will the consultation period run for?"*

It will run until mid-September.

*"How long is the document?"*

50 pages, but there are no images in it yet – only 1 map and 3-4 graphics. Once the images are included it will eventually be longer. People can look at the sections relevant to them.

People need to be encouraged to go on-line and participate in the survey too.

*"Will the NPA be able to identify land managers when commenting?"*

The NPA will look at this, but the first question is linked to what sector of the community you come from.

*"What level of response will be classed as good and what quality of response?"*

There are no set rules. All answers will need to be evidence based, so that the ideas can be taken on board.

Mr Tristram highlighted that it is important that members respond individually and also e-mail questions to the SDLMG ([sdlmg@southdownsland.com](mailto:sdlmg@southdownsland.com)) so that we can add these into the SDLMG responses. We rely on members telling us their thoughts and we can then build these into the meetings we attend.

He would also like feedback from the membership on the frequency of the Newsletter – at the moment we anticipate producing 2 a year. Is this too much or not enough?

We also currently hold 2 meeting each year for the members – one attached to the AGM and one in the autumn. Is this too much or not enough? There is a proposal to put the AGM on a separate date to coincide with an EC meeting and inviting members to come along, so that we do not cram the AGM and summer meeting together.

Please e-mail your comments and thoughts.

**Action : SDLMG members.**

*"Why did the NPA choose now – September as their timetable? It is the farmer's busiest time of year. There is a risk you will not get the response that is needed".*

The survey should take about half an hour to complete.

Mr Tristram, along with other EC Officers will be attending an Officer Liaison meeting next week (27<sup>th</sup> June). If you have any questions you would like raised at the meeting, please could you e-mail him and he will bring them up for discussion.

Mr Tristram thanked all of our speakers and the members for their help. He also thanked our hosts Trevor and Jenny Passmore, and there being no other business closed the meeting.