**South Downs National Park update June 2025**

Please give consideration to the invitation I circulated to comment on the latest iteration of the draft Management Plan for the SDNP. Whilst 40 out of the 67 parishes in Chichester District are partially or wholly in the National Park, many of the issues the document addresses can affect the wider area. Whilst the SDNPA is required to update this document every five years, it is not just for the Authority, it is for every organisation, and indeed if relevant individuals, to have regard of. That is why it has been called the ‘Partnership Management Plan’.

That point made, parishes within the National Park are more likely to be interested in the revised Local Plan, which has just been through its Reg 18 consultation. I became a Chichester District Councillor in 1999, and was immediately made aware of the pressing need to update the 1991 local plan for the District. It proved very challenging, and that pressure hasn’t changed. Producing a sound Local Plan is mighty time-consuming and far from straightforward, and whilst the National Park isn’t required to allocate large areas for development, many policy conflicts have to be addressed. On 12th June, a 6 hour member / officer workshop considered potential sites, policies and the general direction of travel of the Plan. There this likely to be a noticeable increase in the number of dwellings completed annually in the National Park, but not to the detriment of the reasons why the area was chosen to be a National Park.

Away from updating statutory documents the NPA strives to ensure that not only is the SDNP kept in a condition that merits its status, but also that visitors can enjoy and appreciate it. There is the need to encourage visits by individuals and groups within society who for various reasons would tend not to visit outdoor spaces. Facilitating this can be challenging but worthwhile. Farmers and landowners, and the way they manage the countryside is vitally important, and at this time of uncertainty for farming businesses NPA officers are giving vital assistance by using their expertise to interpret legislation and unlock grants. The cooperation and understanding of the landowners and users is essential; without it the limited resources of the SDNPA would have little impact on most areas of the SDNP. One place we concentrate on is the Seven Sisters Country Park, which is owned by the Authority. Located between Brighton and Eastbourne, it is a ‘honey-pot’ that both requires good visitor management and enables us to showcase chalk grassland conservation.

Finance remains a concern. DERFA grants have been frozen or reduced for several years, and to combat this the NPA has strived to identify alternate sources of income to supplement the grant. Many organisations are facing a similar problem, and the Authority has made it a priority to ensure it can effectively make its case to ensure it has the resources with which to operate successfully in the future. The latest financial review from the government doesn’t improve matters, but it clarifies that capital remains available for projects that can be delivered within the year the money is offered. Wise to this, the NPA has a number of ‘shovel-ready’ projects to hand, notably cycleways such as the Centurion Way extension north to the South Downs Way.

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