

CULTURE, TOURISM & ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 67

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject: Update on the South Downs National Park

Date of Meeting: 1st April 2010

Report of: Director of Environment

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Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE/ EXEMPTIONS

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The South Downs has been formally designated a national park and this report provides the relevant background.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) To note the report.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 National Park purposes are:

- Conserving the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area and
- Promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public.

In pursuing these purposes, the National Park Authority must seek to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities within the Park.

- 3.2 On 12th November 2009, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs formally confirmed the designation of the South Downs as a National Park. The National Park designation replaces the two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) on 31st March 2010, and replaces the South Downs Joint Committee (SDJC) in April 2011,

which has been overseeing part of the area that becomes the Park.

- 3.3 The South Downs National Park (SDNP) will be the third largest English National Park with an area of 1,625 km². It will have a population of 107,929 within its boundaries making it the most densely populated National Park in the UK.
- 3.4 Over 40% of the area of Brighton & Hove, 3,738.5 hectares (9,237.8 acres), will be in the SDNP (**Appendix 1 – Map of SDNP land in BHCC**).

Boundary

- 3.5 A larger area encompassing the Western Weald, Lewes and Ditchling has been included in the National Park designation. Following representations to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) from the community and the council adjustments were made to also include Green Ridge (originally excluded).
- 3.6 Toads Hole Valley in Hove is the largest single area currently in the Sussex Downs AONB, but outside the SDNP. The steeper slopes to the west are designated Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) and statutory open access land. The Inspector now considers that the land, in private ownership, has deteriorated since the first Inquiry because of the increase in traffic noise; has been further harmed by unauthorised motor cycle use; and is not available for de facto public use because erection of a the new fence and ditch, (constructed by the owners just before the Inquiry reopened).

The Farm Estate and the Downland Initiative

- 3.7 The council owns 4,045 hectares (9,991 acres) of farmland, much of which is subject to secure agricultural tenancies, and currently largely under intensive agricultural use. (**Appendix 2 - BHCC owned land in the SDNP**)
- 3.8 The Downland Initiative has been established for a number of years with the principle aims of securing more sustainable management of the Downland surrounding the City so that it delivers greater social and environmental benefits to both local people and visitors. The four main areas, listed below, fit with the purposes of a National Park:
 - agriculture and land use - establish a sustainable agricultural system on the Downs with greater emphasis on local healthy food production, diversification and farm management

- access - significantly expand the amount of access land adjacent to the urban fringe, connect existing blocks of open access land, improve links between open access land Rights of Way including “easy access” routes, connecting the urban area into the countryside, provide for the needs of cyclists and horse riders
- wildlife and landscape – conserve and enhance downland habitats and species to meet biodiversity Action plan targets, landscape enhancement and habitat restoration
- education and interpretation – implement an integrated interpretation and publicity strategy for residents and visitors, school visits, etc.

3.9 A steering group consisting of representatives from South Downs Joint Committee, Natural England, East Sussex County Council, Smiths Gore and internal officers from planning, countryside and property teams have developed and been implementing an action plan which is dependent on securing funding where appropriate. As the National Park Authority will replace the South Downs Joint Committee and close working with that authority will be crucial, it will be appropriate for an officer from National Park Authority to join the steering group.

Gateway Sites

3.10 Work has been undertaken to highlight a number of key sites across the city with easier access to the National Park. It is proposed that such sites are promoted and display notice boards explaining local walks, features and history. The following sites have been identified as potential as National Park ‘gateways’ including traffic impact analysis (Appendix 3 – Map of Proposed Gateway Sites):

- East Brighton Park pavilion, off Wilson Avenue BN2 5PA (part sports facilities and part café adjacent to SDNP).
- Rottingdean windmill, Beacon Hill, Rottingdean BN2 7BS (Rottingdean Preservation Society).
- Pickers Hill Farm, Saltdean Vale, Saltdean (farm buildings leased to tenant farmer).
- Happy Valley recreation ground, Falmer Road, Woodingdean.
- Falmer, in the village eg at Park farm shop just off Falmer Road
- Wild Park, off Lewes Road
- Hollingbury golf course entrance, Ditchling Road.
- Devil’s Dyke hotel, Devil’s Dyke Road, Brighton BN1 8YJ (leased to brewery).
- Benfield Hill LNR, Benfield
- Foredown Tower, Foredown Road BN41 2EW (leased to sea cadets).

- Mile Oak farm, Mile Oak Road BN41 2RF (leased to tenant farmer).
- Waterhall Recreation ground, off Mill Road, BN1 8ZD.
- Green Ridge, Dyke Road Avenue
- Patcham Place, London Road, BN1 8YD.
- Stanmer Park (see Section 1, Major visitor gateway)

- Norton farm buildings, Balsdean, Rottingdean BN2 7LA (redundant farm buildings in SDNP and adjacent to Castle Hill National Nature Reserve).

3.11 Stanmer traditional farm building are also proposed for a major National Park gateway visitor centre with associated facilities including museum/heritage centre, function space for schools and community groups, sustainable food and farming centre, retail facilities, workshops, office space and a food outlet. Funding for a feasibility study is currently being investigated by Property services.

Rights of Way

- 3.12 The South Downs National Park will not be a Highway Authority although local authorities could delegate powers such as rights of way to the National Park. Rights of way will be the key form of access to the National Park. The advantage of delegating their management to the National Park is ensuring a consistent standard for rights of way across the whole area, and clarity for visitors of the park as which organisation is responsible for a rights of way. However, this advantage requires all the counties as well as this council determine to transfer this function.
- 3.13 As Highway Authority BHCC will retain responsibility for the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP).

Access authority

- 3.13 The South Downs National Park will be the Access Authority and will therefore become responsible for over 40% of the area currently covered by Brighton & Hove Local Access Forum (LAF) which will remain the access authority for the area of BHCC outside the SDNP. The two LAFs will be required to cooperate. Lessons on working closely will be transferred from the current experience of working with the current non-statutory South Downs LAF.
- 3.14 As Access Authority the South Downs National Park Authority will also have statutory responsibility for statutory open access land, as well as the South Downs Way national trail.

Location of South Downs National Park Offices

- 3.14 The South Downs National Park Authority will require headquarters and/or area offices. The councils property team has provide details of sites within Brighton and Hove including Patcham Place on London Road which is just within the Park, Patcham Court Farm, city centre locations and Stanmer farm buildings.
- 3.15 It is expected that the National Park Authority will determine the shape of its organisation in June this year which will inform the size and number of offices it will need. It then plans to agree criteria for selecting property in the summer. Consideration will need to given to the particular access issues with the long and thin nature of the Park and the operational impact such a geography has.

Planning

- 3.16 National Parks have usually taken on the full planning functions (Local Development Framework as well as Development Control) as key requirement of their role as this represents the greatest part of their powers as an authority.
- 3.17 In terms of Development Control, the South Downs will be the most populated National Park, and the level of planning applications could be in the region of 4,000 applications (the same number handled by Brighton and Hove City Council). The Peak District National Park handles 1,330 per annum.
- 3.18 The Brighton & Hove population in the South Downs National Park consists of approximately 100 households (excluding St Dunstan's and Roedean School), half of which are at Rottingdean Place, a quarter at Stanmer and the rest linked to the farmland around the city.
- 3.19 The impact of transferring development control functions from district councils to the new National Park Authority is significant and this has been recognised by Defra. As such, the current proposal, subject to approval by the National Park Authority, is for the Authority to delegate, within a framework, the planning function back to the local authorities. The framework currently under discussion will include which planning applications should be determined by local authorities and those that should be referred to National Park Authority, funding for local authorities undertaking the planning function on behalf of the National Park Authority and agreeing common standards.
- 3.20 Also under discussion are interim and permanent arrangements for the planning policy background for decisions within the park. The National Park Authority is likely to publish interim policy statements to provide a consistent approach across the Park Area and to guide preparation of plans being completed by the constituent authorities. A priority for the Authority will be to publish, during 2010/11, its work programme to complete its own local

- 5.4 There are no specific sustainability implications arising from this report other than to note the purposes of national park authorities.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

Risk & Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 There are no specific risk and opportunity implications arising from this report.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.7 There are no specific corporate or citywide implications arising from this report.

6. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 To note the report.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Map of South Downs National Park land in Brighton & Hove City Council.
2. Map of Brighton & Hove City Council owned land in the South Downs National Park.
3. Map of proposed Gateway sites.

Documents in Members' Rooms

1. None

Background Documents

1. None

