

SOUTH DOWNS NEIGHBOURHOOD & COMMUNITY

PLANNING SPECIALISTS



Neighbourhood Development Plans – Provision of expert advice to Qualifying Bodies and Local Planning Authorities in protected and rural landscapes.

Report of the SDNPA use of the funding award

In February 2016 the Department for Communities and Local Government awarded the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) £30,000 from its 'Neighbourhood Planning and Local Planning Service Redesign and Capacity Building' fund.

SDNPA was awarded funding to 'continue to explore the provision of expert advice to Qualifying Bodies and Local Planning Authorities in protected and rural landscapes.'

This report sets out how the SDNPA have used the funding to support the delivery of Neighbourhood Plans outside of the National Park and test the feasibility of setting up a consultancy arm.

The proposal

As a National Park Authority (NPA) we are experienced in working in partnership with local rural communities to deliver enhancements, planning in a protected landscape, utilising our technical skills, and understanding of rural issues to enable growth in sensitive areas. Designations that protect landscape namely National Parks and Areas of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB) cover about 23% of England and Wales.

Planning in protected landscapes is a more complex process, and for voluntary groups with limited planning experience or expertise this can be particularly challenging. These groups are challenged to produce a Neighbourhood Plan which respects the protected landscape whilst meeting the needs of local people and having the best chance of passing referendum.

As a National Park Authority we are working with almost 50 NDP groups and we have an increasing body of experience in this area of work. Some of these communities are now in the early stages of reviewing their plan. Many communities across the country are seeking the help of consultants to assist them through similar processes. Through the use of this grant funding we have explored and tested the establishment of a consultancy / trading arm to the SDNPA. We have scoped a specific market that we will serve namely NDP groups and Local Authorities working in protected and rural landscapes. Two areas of work to focus on have been identified as:

- a) Community and neighbourhood planning advice to local communities particularly parish councils and neighbourhood forums focusing on national parks, AONBs, rural areas and market towns. Advice would range from 'choosing the right plan for you' through to working alongside the community from designation through to referendum.
- b) Providing community and neighbourhood planning advice and resources to other national parks authorities and LPAs with large areas of protected landscapes or extensive rural areas such as the High Weald AONB, the Cotswolds AONB and the Chilterns AONB. Not all will employ a Neighbourhood Planning / Community Liaison Officer, even less have access to Rangers and others so used to working with local landowners and groups in a rural setting

Being in a position to share our experience and expertise helps NDP groups outside of the South Downs National Park avoid some of the more common pitfalls, save resources / funds and help to speed up the process of neighbourhood planning in these areas.

The SDNPA is currently reliant on national park grant (NPG) and planning income to deliver core functions. It is apparent that there is a need to consider the options available to the SDNPA in terms of diversifying reliance on NPG through the development of other income streams. Securing 'unrestricted' income is increasingly important. Projects that deliver our objectives and contribute to supporting staff and running costs are important to the successful continued delivery of the Purposes and Duty of the National Park. This is one such project that could contribute to this.

The Outcomes

The grant funding has supported us to:

- Prepare a business plan which was then reviewed by an external planning practitioner operating in the private sector. This business plan sets out the ethos, unique selling points of the consultancy, main target audiences and establishes a number of targets. This will be reviewed in 2018.
- Train a number of staff in the basics of marketing and business promotion.
- Production of some initial promotional leaflets and a banner. Having a trade stall at a Conference. Further bookings have also been made for this year.
- Start setting up a website, separate to the South Downs National Park but sharing its identity.
- Part fund members of staff in promoting the consultancy and undertaking various pieces of work including Local Green Space assessment, landscape assessment and Housing Needs Assessment. Details of the work to date and some key learning points is set out in the table below:

To date this work has collectively generated approximately £18,000 of income. The target for next year is approximately £25 – 30,000.

Support given to Parishes through the Commercial arm of the SDNPA

Parish Council / Local Authority Area	Support given	Lessons learnt
<p>Rudgwick Parish (Horsham District)</p> <p>Rural Parish, not in a protected landscape</p>	<p>Professional support at community meetings</p> <p>Preparation of Housing Needs Assessment in accordance with Aecom guidance note</p>	<p>Contracts The SDNPA drew up a Service Level Agreement with client. It set out a daily rate and an estimate of the number of days needed for the completion of key pieces of work. This works better for the Parish as they are not making a large financial commitment at an early stage in the process and better for the SDNPA who are also not committed over the long term. This allows the consultancy work to be balanced to some extent with the day to day work loads of Officers. Both parties were able to pull out with limited notice.</p> <p>Momentum Considerable amount of un-costed time is spent supporting the group and maintaining momentum. Change in Parish Council leadership can significantly change relationships with consultants.</p> <p>Uncertainty over planning policy Although not specific to this project, the uncertainty over planning in areas where housing figures have not been established for communities by the Local Authority causes a lot of dead-ends to be gone down. Asking volunteers to take responsibility to establishing a housing figure for their own community is on the whole unsuccessful and a step too far for most. This can cause many to leave the process and feel vulnerable to 'attack' from their own communities and developers. As a consultancy this was not something we could give sufficient reassurance over as we had no control.</p>
<p>Storrington Parish (Horsham District)</p> <p>Rural Parish, some areas of protected landscape</p>	<p>Local Green Space Assessment</p>	<p>Independence We have adopted an ethos of encouraging communities to do what they can themselves and only looking to seek support when they need to. Most communities are capable of undertaking a Local Green Space assessment. However, on occasions, when it might be controversial some Parishes see real value in using an independent consultant to do the analysis. This is an area where we have been able to assist. We have however been clear to assess sites only, the decision as to whether to include them in a plan or not, must be for the community. It is their plan and they need to defend the decisions that take.</p> <p>Multiple Iterations There is a need to be aware of the number of iterations that might be made to a document. We</p>

		had factored in time for 1, but in reality there were multiple. This is particularly the case in the area of community planning when often multiple people want to have an input. Be prepared to draw a line under the work that has been done!
<p>Thruxton Parish (Test Valley Borough)</p> <p>Rural Parish</p> <p>This has now been followed up with a similar contract with Hook Parish Council (Hart District Council)</p>	<p>Preparation of Local Green Space Assessment</p> <p>Preparation of Regulation 14 plan</p>	<p>Bite sized chunks</p> <p>For both a Parish at a fairly early stage and the SDNPA making a commitment to work together over a long period of time, potentially years, can be difficult. We have therefore decided to break the work into 'bite-sized' chunks. We have bid for work in stages, rather than its totality and will discuss with the client the next steps at appropriate times. This also ties in better with the grant funding process through Locality.</p>
<p>Kings Sombourne</p> <p>Rural Parish</p>	<p>Landscape Assessment work</p>	<p>Valuable loss leaders</p> <p>This was our first experience of doing landscape assessment work for an external client. It required us to set up a template and test a methodology that can be replicated. We also took the opportunity to train another member of staff in landscape assessment work using our existing experienced staff. Although this took longer than we quoted for the resulting work can be used for future commissions, will be far quicker and can be part of the package of evidence used to identify suitable sites for development within protected landscapes.</p> <p>Freedom of Information Requests</p> <p>As a public body we are subject to Freedom of Information requests. This has been brought to our attention through our work in King Sombourne when a landowner requested to see a report we had prepared for the community before it was published.</p>
<p>Hook Parish Council (Hart District Council)</p> <p>Rural Parish</p>	<p>Preparation of Regulation 14 plan</p>	<p>We have just been appointed by Hook Parish Council to take their draft Neighbourhood Plan and turn it into a Regulation 14 Plan for consultation. The work will be similar to that we have done for Thruxton.</p>

Next Steps

Following the initial work and success we are intending to grow the business and its reputation. We will be undertaking the following areas of work:

1. **Trading Account** – There are currently legal restrictions on the extent to which a National Park Authority can trade for commercial gain and therefore at some point the SDNPA will want to remove those restrictions by setting up a wholly or partly owned private company with the power to trade. Before we do this, we want to test further that we have a viable trading model. We are therefore setting up an internal trading account in this financial year.
2. **Marketing** – Some limited marketing has taken place including the production of a leaflet, exhibiting at Parish Council and other events and the establishment of a web page. This will be a key focus of work in order to grow the consultancy.
3. **Partnership Working** – We are looking to build our links with the private sector. This might include operating as a sub-contractor to a larger consultancy who is working in an area of protected landscape. We are also looking to build links with universities and researchers.
4. **Raising the profile** – our biggest marketing tool is our National Park Authority staff. We are raising the profile of our work with all staff so that they can promote our services when they are out and about, often in other National Parks. We will also be asking senior members of staff, Members and National Appointees to use the networks they operate in to promote our work. Our research to date has shown that main promotional tool is word of mouth.
5. **Staff resourcing** – we will be seconding / appointing staff to the consultancy for the next two years to support those already working for it.

WHAT WE DO

We can help you prepare plans to deliver sustainable development which is sensitive to the location and firmly guided by the community's needs and aspirations. We have the extensive knowledge and expertise needed to provide neighbourhood and community planning support to both Parish Councils and Local Planning Authorities in National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, market towns and rural areas. We are able to provide specialist advice on landscape, biodiversity, design and cultural heritage.

EXAMPLES OF SUPPORT FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN GROUPS

- Getting started, setting objectives
- Collecting evidence e.g. site assessment, housing needs assessment, local green space assessment and sustainability appraisals
- Policy writing
- Basic conditions and consultation statements
- Implementing and reviewing your neighbourhood plan

SUPPORT COMMUNITIES IN PREPARING THE FOLLOWING COMMUNITY LED PLANS

- Parish plans
- Village design statements
- Local landscape character assessments
- Local list of historic buildings

EXAMPLES OF SUPPORT FOR LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITIES

- Designating a neighbourhood area
- Strategic environmental assessment screening
- Responding to pre-submission consultation
- Publicising a neighbourhood plan at submission stage
- Co-ordinating an independent examination

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