

South Downs National Park Public Inquiry
(Re-opened)

Governance

by



May 2008

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The South Downs Campaign (SDC) is submitting this short note on governance in response to amendments to legislation and their implications for the South Downs National Park. In addition, the SDC would like to make a short response to a point made on development control, by East Sussex County Council in its response to the summer 2007 consultation.

2 Governance

- 2.1 The SDC notes that since the end of the first part of the inquiry in March 2005, Section 61 of NERC Act 2006 has amended the basic formula governing the composition of National Park Authorities. This is fully explained in paragraphs 20 – 22 of Natural England’s Position Paper 1 (CD #1) and is not repeated here.
- 2.2 At the same time, the size of the existing English National Park Authorities has been reduced to 22 members each, with the exception of the Peak District National Park Authority which has 30 members¹. This exception was granted to the Peak District because of the large number of local authority areas that it covers, 12 in all, and the fact that it straddles several regions too.
- 2.3 The PSDNP covers 15 local authority areas (with or without the Western Weald) which, like the Peak District, is high compared to other English National Parks. Therefore the SDC believes that the membership of the future South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) should not be restricted to 22 members and that a similarly flexible approach to that applied to the Peak District National Park Authority should be followed.
- 2.4 This would allow all or most of the local authorities to be represented on the SDNPA which will be important if the local authorities are to be persuaded to offer full support to the National Park during its formative years.
- 2.5 The SDC would also caution against having too small a SDNPA given the changes that have taken place within local authority governance in recent years and the workload that the Secretary of State appointees often find themselves under. In the first instance, the move to a cabinet system at a local authority level has meant that power has been concentrated in fewer hands.
- 2.6 For the SDNPA it is important that it attracts these cabinet members from its constituent local authorities, otherwise politically it will not be taken seriously and will be unlikely to have the necessary clout to be listened to at a regional level. However, in doing so, a large proportion of its membership will be extremely busy handling their local authority portfolios and will therefore have less time to devote to their SDNPA duties. This is already apparent in the knock-on impact this has had on the workload of Natural England appointees on the South Downs Joint Committee

¹ Paragraph 21, CD #1

who often have to take the lead on much of its work because the elected members are too busy.

- 2.7 Therefore having a small SDNPA would mean having only a few Secretary of State appointees which could lead to them becoming overwhelmed resulting in a deleterious effect on the work of the authority.

3 Development Control

- 3.1 In its initial representation to the public consultation in summer 2007 (ID No. #1115), East Sussex County Council stated:

“Clarity is also sought on the issue of Regulation 3 applications, as the Inspector makes no reference to County Councils’ own development proposals in the report. In the same way that County Councils determine their own development proposals in the district council areas within their county, then so too would it be logical for them to do so in a National Park Authority’s area within their county.”

- 3.2 The SDC would be strongly opposed to this principle applying and believes that, to avoid any possible conflict of interest, the SDNPA should decide any planning applications submitted by district and county councils within the National Park, as is the case for other National Park Authorities.