

South Downs National Park Public Inquiry

Part 4: Administration

NPA Membership

Proof of Evidence

by



September 2004

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The South Downs Campaign (SDC) submits the following proof of evidence on the membership of the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) which it submits to the Inspector for consideration.
- 1.2 The SDC is a network of organisations working for the best possible South Downs National Park, representing over 90 national, regional and local groups and organisations¹.
- 1.3 This proof of evidence is part of a series of submissions to the Public Inquiry by the SDC and should be read in the context of the SDC's proof of evidence 'SDC 'In Principle' Support for the South Downs National Park'². It represents the SDC's comments and thoughts on how a South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) should be constituted. It should be read in conjunction with the SDC's proof of evidence 'Administration – Summary of Recommendations'³.

2 National Park Authority Membership

2.1 Representation

- 2.1.1 The SDC considers that the membership of the South Downs National Park Authority should be given careful consideration. The SDC is aware that Defra is currently consulting on proposals which would reduce the number of members of English National Park Authorities, following the recommendations of the 2002 Review of English National Park Authorities⁴.
- 2.1.2 The SDC is also aware that the Rural Affairs Minister has recognised that the Peak District National Park Authority is a special case and that it should be enabled to have more members than the proposed standard 22 member authority. Given the likely number of local authorities which would be involved in the SDNPA the SDC considers that serious consideration should be given to the South Downs also being treated as a special case. The SDC notes that it would be possible to have an authority of 29 members which still allowed all 15 local authorities to be represented on the SDNPA and for the spirit of the 1995 Environment Act Legislation, which defines the proportional representation, to be met (see paragraph 2.2.1).

2.2 Proportional representation

- 2.2.1 The formula of one representative from each local authority (15) plus 7 parish councillors and 7 Secretary of State nominees meets the spirit of the proportions in the 1995 Environment Act legislation and as such the SDC believes that it should be given serious consideration.

¹ SDC Biography – Inquiry Document No: 3275/1/1

² SDC 'In Principle' Support for the South Downs National Park – Inquiry Document No: 3275/3/1

³ SDC Administration – Summary of Recommendations – Inquiry Document No: 3275/36/1

⁴ Recommendation 22, page 37, Defra Review of English National Park Authorities, July 2002 – Inquiry Document No: CD 9

2.2.2 Whatever the final membership formula - and the SDC recognises that this will be dealt with by the Secretary of State in guidance to the National Park Authority (NPA) rather than by the Inspector at the inquiry - it is essential that mechanisms are developed to help ensure that NPA meetings and committee structures are as efficient as possible while ensuring that these are publicly transparent and accountable and involve the right mix of Authority members. This will be a matter for the National Park Authority following its establishment but we would welcome the Inspector's endorsement of these important principles.

2.2.3 The SDC considers that it is worth noting that the existing proportional representation on the Sussex Downs Conservation Board is similar to that of a National Park Authority, although the local authorities and Countryside Agency have slightly bigger proportions than on a NPA because there is no Parish Council representation. As such introducing a NPA in terms of structure is an evolutionary step, not a revolutionary one.

2.3 Parish Council members

2.3.1 The SDC welcomes the inclusion of Parish Council members on a SDNPA, and notes that they are currently largely excluded from the existing management structures for the South Downs, having no direct representation on the Sussex Downs Conservation Board and only one representative on the East Hampshire AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

2.3.2 The SDC considers that the exact mechanism for selecting parish members should be determined locally. It is essential that whatever process is used, it should be an open and democratic one, preferably involving some form of elections which could be organised through the county associations.

3 Chairmanship

3.1.1 It is highly desirable that the chair of the NPA is elected by the NPA members. However, it must be borne in mind that the chair will play a crucial leadership role in the development of the National Park and will have to give a great deal of their time to this appointment. The fact that the incumbent will have both a national and a local responsibility suggests that it would be preferable for the appointee to be able to divorce themselves from any specific political affiliation.

4 Training and expertise

4.1.1 The SDC considers it essential that both through the process of selection of members and through ongoing training and briefing, the highest level of expertise and understanding of National Park purposes is achieved among all members. We would hope that this matter is covered in some detail in the Secretary of State's guidance to the National Park Authority.

4.1.2 The SDC considers that the Authority will need to ensure a wide range of expertise among its staff and members including on farming, forestry, environmental

management, wildlife, cultural heritage and archaeology, recreation, tourism, community participation, sustainable development and education.

5 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the Secretary of State should appoint more than the recommended 22 NPA members to reflect the size and area of the National Park as has been agreed for the Peak District NPA.

Recommendation 2: That parish council membership should be determined locally in an open and democratic way.

Recommendation 3: That all members should undergo training.