

Case Study

Planning Questions– The importance of partnership working

Background

Ranger services are part of all National Park (NP) Services in the UK and globally; they are a key component of the South Downs National Park Authority's (SDNPA) work. Each area team comprises an Area Manager, Rangers and Volunteers Rangers, providing specialist advice on;

- biodiversity
- access
- and land management

The Rangers offer hands-on support and advice to land managers, community and conservation groups, parish councils and individuals, thereby mediating between the landscape and the people.

Rangers, commonly known as the National Park's eyes and ears on the ground, also work closely with the area Planning Link Officers (PLO) on a variety of planning related matters.

When out and about in their 'patches' Rangers will often pick up on new building works, engineering operations, and other planning issues. On occasion they may notice something unusual; in the first instance, working together with their PLO, they will investigate to see if something has planning permission, whether it requires permission and assess the impact of 'the works/building' on the landscape of the South Downs National Park.



Golf Practice Nets, a 'blot' on the protected landscape?

The project

In January 2014, in her capacity as a National Park Ranger, Phillippa Morrison-Price noticed that new 'illuminous green' practice nets had been erected at a golf course within the National Park. The nature, visual prominence of the structure, colour and materials used, meant that the nets were judged to be incongruous with the landscape and in turn having a detrimental impact on the natural beauty of the National Park.

Paragraph 115 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that:

'Great weight should be given to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of National Parks which have the highest status of protection.'

Phillippa alerted Roy Little, Planning Link Officer for this area. Roy raised the matter with the relevant 'host' planning authority to investigate for and on behalf of the SDNPA. The enforcement team discovered that the practice nets did not have planning permission and the golf course was invited to submit a retrospective planning application.

An application was received.

“It’s siting and appearance make it stand out as a discordant and intrusive feature within the attractive downland landscape of the South Downs National Park”

Robert Parker, Planning Inspector

The outcome

In April 2014 the retrospective planning application was refused on the grounds of ‘the negative impact on the landscape’ and the golf club was asked to remove the structures. The golf club then lodged an appeal with the Planning Inspectorate.

In February 2015 the Planning Inspector dismissed the appeal. At the time of the site visit the practice nets were still in place; the inspector was therefore able to see ‘first hand’ the impact of their appearance and location on the landscape and character of the National Park.

Phillippa and Roy are now working closely with the golf club to seek a workable solution that both protects the character of the landscape and meets the needs of the golf club and golfing community.

The golf club have now removed the practice nets and have developed two options for more suitable locations for the practice nets that show respect for this special landscape, whilst still meeting the needs of the golf club.

A revised application has now been submitted.

This case highlights both the importance of clear and consistent communication on planning law and processes and the need for on-going promotion of the advice and guidance available from both SDNPA officers and planning host authorities, which can be most effective when sought by potential applicants at the earliest point in the process.

The future

The whole process, which took over a year, is a great example of SDNPA officers working in effective partnership to achieve a successful outcome.

In this case SDNPA Planning and Ranger officers worked collaboratively with both our host planning authority, and the golf club, to seek a workable solution that equally protects the character of the landscape and meets the need of the golf club and golfing community.

SDNPA officers will continue to promote their service, offering hands-on support and advice to;

- land managers
- community groups
- conservation groups
- parish councils
- businesses
- and individuals

Thereby continuing to act as a ‘go-between’ between the landscape and the people.

For further information about the Ranger service please contact:

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