

Whole Estate Plans

Background

In 2015 the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) introduced the concept of Whole Estate Plans (WEP) to the South Downs National Park. A WEP is a non-statutory plan setting out the aspirations of an individual land-owning organisation, which can be Estates, large farms, schools, Local Authorities or other institutions. It enables collaboration between a landowner and the SDNPA to achieve the ambitions of the landowner while also delivering on the Partnership Management Plan Outcomes in pursuit of the National Park's purposes and duty.

It sets out the vision, the assets they have, and the opportunities and threats which the organisation faces, and describe the plans for the future.

Whole Estate Plans encourage land owners to look at their land and property in its entirety. Once completed, a WEP provides baseline information which can be used to identify opportunities and aid decision making. WEPs help to identify mutually acceptable and proactive solutions which serve the wider purposes of the National Park whilst recognising the vital role that estates play in the protected landscape. The approach has been adopted by other organisations in the UK including the Lake District National Park Authority.



The project

Whole Estate Plans are an innovative concept for a National Park Authority looking to foster good working relationships with key stakeholders and facilitate better understanding of the issues surrounding sustainable rural estate communities.

They are not focused on or limited to planning matters, but rather the whole husbandry of the estate – farming, woodland management, conservation, diversification, access provision etc. To date around 28 holdings have been engaged in the process, either through attending workshops, preparing drafts or working with SDNPA to further the development of a WEP.

They enable collaboration and improve dialogue, they facilitate the understanding of the National Park's Special Qualities, they identify opportunities and threats to the estate and, importantly, they enable better understanding of the pressures facing estates.

They also enable a landowner/estate to demonstrate how they contribute to the outcomes and priorities identified in the South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan. An endorsed WEP will be a material consideration in determining planning applications. Planning applications that are part of a WEP will be called in by the SDNPA and they will provide a solid contextual background to any development proposals. A WEP can also be used to help guide and support funding bids, inform future neighbourhood development plan production, agri-environment and forestry schemes and with other natural capital projects. They also serve as an important communication tool within the community to enable a better understanding at a local level as well as providing a clear direction for legacy and succession planning.

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“This Whole Estate Plan explains the context and history of West Dean Estate, it provides an audit of its assets and it also describes its current operation. Perhaps, most usefully though, the Plan enables a better understanding of the Estate’s rich natural capital and how this might be conserved and developed in a sustainable and sensitive way. ”

Alexander Barron – Chief Executive West Dean Estate, Jan 2019

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The outcome

To date, there have been 5 Whole Estate Plans endorsed by the SDNPA:

- Highfield Whole Estate Plan
- Iford Whole Estate Plan
- Newton Valance Whole Estate Plan
- West Dean Whole Estate Plan
- Wiston Whole Estate Plan

Following endorsement there have been many examples of where the WEPs have helped secure planning permission or positive interventions to deliver the National Park Purposes and Duty. For example, planning permission has been granted for major redevelopment of a redundant Turkey Farm at Wiston, for an expanded wine production enterprise, commercial and employment space, as well as significant improvements to green infrastructure and the provision of holiday accommodation. Another example is SDNPA rangers working closely with the West Dean Estate to deliver improved habitat for the Duke of Burgundy butterfly.

Since the endorsement of the Whole Estate plan at Newton Valence multiple environmental benefits have been achieved such as creation of new pollen and nectar plots for invertebrates and supplementary feeding for farmland bird populations at key times of the year. Precision farming techniques that have been adopted have increased soil fauna such as earthworms, reduced fertiliser and erosion. Cover crops and buffer strips have also improved the farmed environment for wildlife. This work is constantly shared with other farmers and the wider community through the local farm cluster of the Selborne Landscape Partnership.

The future

We continue to develop and improve our guidance for producing WEPs, to make sure the SDNPA is offering the best support to landowners/estates.

As more WEPs are endorsed, the importance of monitoring how they are delivering on their action plans is key. Systems to connect the estate with the right people within the SDNPA to deliver these are also being introduced. The action plan is monitored by members of staff and helps to manage relationships and look for opportunities to work together on outcomes.

Guidance to demonstrate how WEPs can support the Local Plan are being developed, including through the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document.

The opportunity for WEPs to be adapted to work with smaller landholdings is also being explored. This would enable better delivery of the Partnership Management Plan outcomes on a macro and micro scale within the landscape.

For more information, please contact:

weps@southdowns.gov.uk

The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) 2014–19 sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. Following the review process for the 2020–2025 Partnership Management Plan, 10 updated Outcomes have been agreed to provide a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality.

This project can successfully deliver on all new PMP outcomes

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