

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

NFNPA 582/19

AUTHORITY MEETING – 29 AUGUST 2019

PARTNERSHIP FOR SOUTH HAMPSHIRE: INVITATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Report by: Steve Avery, Executive Director

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Authority has been invited to join the Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH). This paper sets out the background, functions and objectives of the Partnership, and assesses the advantages or otherwise of whether the Authority should join.
- 1.2 The Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH) is a strategic partnership comprising Hampshire County Council, the unitary authorities of Portsmouth and Southampton, and the local authorities of Eastleigh, East Hampshire, Fareham, Gosport, Havant, New Forest, Test Valley, and Winchester.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) was formed in 2003 and initially comprised the two unitary authorities, the county council and four of the district councils. This expanded in 2004 to 11 councils.
- 2.2 More recently (June 2019) the PUSH Joint Committee agreed a request from New Forest District Council for the whole of their authority to be a member of PUSH (they were previously "part-in" authorities along with East Hants, Test Valley and Winchester). To reflect the fact that the geography was no longer all "urban" it was also agreed that the partnership should be renamed the Partnership for South Hampshire to better reflect who and what it represents. At the same meeting, it was also agreed that both the South Downs National Park Authority and the New Forest National Park Authority should be offered membership of the newly constituted PfSH.
- 2.3 PfSH authorities consider that there are benefits of working together to support the sustainable economic growth of the sub region and to facilitate the strategic planning functions necessary to support that growth.
- 2.4 PfSH has no statutory powers or functions but works collaboratively with partner agencies in the sub region, the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership, as well as key Government Departments to ensure joined up strategies, pooling of resources and delivery of programmes that focus on better outcomes for local people.

The Partnership's Vision and Objectives

- 2.5 The Partnership's **Vision** for South Hampshire over the next 20 years is:
 - An area offering prosperity and a high quality of life for residents

- A location of choice for growing business
- A major centre of excellence in innovation and technology, enabling smarter and more sustainable growth
- A place where the benefits of growth are shared by all sectors and communities.
- A brighter future will be based on a strengthened economy, thereby reinforcing existing communities and broadening the types and range of housing available to meet the needs of the sub-region. PfSH aims to enhance the quality of life in the sub-region by conserving and enriching our natural and historic environment.

2.6 The Partnership's **objectives** are:

- to improve the economic performance of the sub-region and to narrow the gap of disadvantage that holds us back through an approach of managed, conditional growth.
- promoting economic success by seeking to create a diverse economy where business, enterprise and individuals can flourish, underpinned by modern skills
- providing the homes we need in sustainable communities
- building more cohesive communities and reducing inequalities, closing the gap between deprived areas and the economic performance of PfSH sub-region
- investing in infrastructure and sustainable solutions
- promoting a better quality of life by safeguarding our environment and investing in our urban areas

3 The functions of PfSH

- 3.1 PfSH works in partnership with all who share and have a role in delivering its Vision and Objectives. The Partnership also works closely with the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership regarding economic development and the infrastructure needs to serve the sub-region.
- 3.2 In terms of the planning function, the collaboration serves several important purposes. Under the Localism Act 2011 all local planning authorities have a legal 'Duty to Co-operate' on strategic planning matters. Government guidance confirms that strategic policy-making authorities are required to cooperate with each other, and other bodies, when preparing, or supporting the preparation of policies which address strategic matters. This includes those policies contained in local plans (including minerals and waste plans), spatial development strategies, and marine plans. Co-operation is an important element and benefit of the PfSH.
- 3.3 Co-operation of all planning authorities across the Solent allows for a range of strategic issues to be considered, the joint funding of research into these, and the identification of potential strategic solutions. These outcomes may not be available to individual authorities due to the scale of resources required or the available skills.
- 3.4 Since its inception in 2003, the Partnership has commissioned a wide range of evidence base studies and produced several strategic planning documents for the sub-region. These include the South Hampshire Green Infrastructure Strategy 2017 – 2034; the South Hampshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) 2016

Update; and an Integrated Water Management Study (2008), all of which aim to guide strategic plan-making and decisions across the sub-region in a consistent way.

- 3.5 The Partnership has also produced a Spatial Position Statement (2016), setting out the overall need for and distribution of development in South Hampshire to 2034. It sets out the employment and housing development needed, the protection of the environment and co-ordinates transport and other infrastructure. The Spatial Position Statement forms a significant part of the statutory duty to co-operate that local planning authorities have with each other.
- 3.6 Of particular relevance to the Authority, the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership (also known as Bird Aware Solent) was established under the auspices of PUSH. The Authority is a long standing member of the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership as are Natural England and the RSPB.

4 Considerations of membership

- 4.1 The Authority has never been a member of the PfSH since the designation of the National Park in 2005, as until recently the partnership's work was predominantly focused on urban South Hampshire. The invitation to join the partnership would bring opportunities for the Authority, but also potential issues that need to be considered.
- 4.2 As outlined in Section 3, membership of the PfSH would assist the Authority in delivering its obligations under the Localism Act's 'duty to cooperate'. The recent Inspectors' Report into the Authority's draft Local Plan 2016 – 2036 recognises that the National Park has strong inter-relationships in terms of commuting, migration, economic activity and travel to work patterns with South Hampshire generally and Southampton in particular. Closer engagement with the South Hampshire sub-region would assist in addressing these strategic cross-boundary matters.
- 4.3 The recent independent examination of the Authority's Local Plan 2016 – 2036 also confirmed that the National Park is covered by three Housing Market Areas (HMAs), with the majority of the Park sitting within the Southampton HMA. National policy encourages local planning authorities to work collaboratively across HMAs and this was more challenging for the Authority to do as part of the recent Local Plan review as it was not a member of the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (as was). Membership of PfSH would assist in ensuring the housing need identified for the whole HMA is addressed strategically and this would be beneficial.
- 4.4 In addition to its membership of Bird Aware Solent, the Authority engages with the PfSH on a range of other matters and this engagement could be further strengthened by formal membership of the partnership. For example, the Authority has jointly commissioned evidence base studies with PfSH authorities (e.g. the Hampshire Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment 2016-2036, ORS); and formally corresponded with the PfSH regarding addressing the unmet housing need arising from within the National Park as part of the Local Plan review. This joint working would be strengthened by the Authority being formally represented on the PfSH Joint Committee as a full member.
- 4.5 The Authority's Business Plan 2018 – 2021 and the New Forest National Park Partnership Plan 2015 – 2020 identify a series of actions that will be most effectively delivered through working across administrative boundaries. This includes

supporting the delivery of projects to support the Green Halo Partnership; and the implementation of a strategic approach to mitigating the impacts of development on the New Forest's internationally protected habitats. These examples highlight the work undertaken across local authority boundaries to deliver the National Park purposes and membership of the PfSH would assist in delivering these projects.

- 4.6 The strong focus of the PfSH is to improve the economic performance of the sub-region through an approach of managed growth. The compatibility of this with the two statutory National Park purposes and related duty is an important consideration. Members will be aware that Section 62 of the Environment Act 1995 requires relevant bodies to have regard to the two purposes in making decisions that could affect National Parks. This 'duty of regard', allied to the fact that PfSH also has an objective to promote a better quality of life by safeguarding the environment of South Hampshire, provides reassurance that the voice of the Authority would be respected.
- 4.7 The cost of membership for the Authority would be £750 per year.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 Accepting the invitation for formal membership of the PfSH is considered to offer benefits to the Authority in terms of greater joint working across local authority boundaries. The Authority already engages with partners in South Hampshire on a variety of projects, including the Green Halo Partnership, the 'Bird Aware' Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership, and the joint commissioning of evidence base studies to inform Local Plan preparation under the 'duty to cooperate'; and closer joint working would benefit this cross-boundary work.
- 5.2 The evidence gathered for the Authority's Local Plan review highlights the links between the National Park and South Hampshire. Membership of the PfSH would provide the Authority with a stronger input into the work of the partnership and the forthcoming review of the South Hampshire Spatial Position Statement which will set out the overall future need for and distribution of development in South Hampshire.
- 5.3 In recommending that the Authority accepts the invitation to become a member of the PfSH, it should be emphasised that the partnership focuses on genuinely strategic / sub-regional matters, where it can add value to the efforts of the individual partners. The PfSH does not get involved in direct service delivery or the statutory service roles of the partner authorities. The Authority would therefore retain its statutory functions and benefit from the strategic work undertaken by the partnership.

Recommendation:

- (i) **Members accept the invitation to the National Park Authority to become a member of the Partnership for South Hampshire and to take up a position on the Joint Committee.**
- (ii) **Members nominate a Member (and deputy) to represent the Authority on the Joint Committee.**

Papers:

NFNPA 582/19: Cover paper