

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**AUTHORITY MEETING – 20 JULY 2006**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

**Report by:** Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

**Summary:** Another month of steady progress although vacancies in critical posts in the two purposes Directorates and planning policy continue to be a significant constraint.

**Recommendation:**

**To note the report.**

**Resources:**

Routine

**Other major considerations:**

None

**Paper:**

NFNPA 107/06: Cover paper



**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**AUTHORITY MEETING – 20 JULY 2006**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

**Report by:** Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

1. This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 15 June for all work except planning development control and enforcement – which covers activity in June. Another month of steady progress although vacancies in critical posts in the two purposes Directorates and planning policy continue to be a significant constraint.

**MEMBERS**

2. Some members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events:
  - Planning Development Control Committee review session, 15 June
  - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 20 June
  - Briefing on Defra's consultation on a Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests, 20 June
  - Council for National Parks 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference, 30 June-2 July
  - Standards Committee, 10 July
  - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 18 July.
  
2. Forthcoming activities include:
  - Briefing for those members assisting in the New Forest Show (following Authority meeting on 20 July)
  - Management Plan and Local Development Framework Core Strategy consultation (following the New Forest Show briefing on 20 July)
  - New Forest Show, 25 to 27 July
  - Planning Development Control Committee meeting on 15 August
  - Planning Development Control Committee meeting on 19 September
  - Southern Consortium of National Parks Meeting, Exmoor National Park, 13-14 September
  - Europarc Conference 2006, Oxford, 20-24 September;

and subject to confirmation of dates:

- Tour of Exxon refinery.

## **DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS**

### **First Purpose**

#### **4. Partnership Working:**

- Liaison with the statutory bodies that have a stake in the National Park to discuss their involvement with developing the statement of special qualities and the Management Plan.
- Further discussions with the Verderers over joint working and liaison.
- Further meetings with colleagues in Natural England on future partnership working.
- Participation in Solent Forum and Solent European Sites Management Scheme meetings including a visit to view some potential sites for managed re-alignment of the coast in the New Forest.

#### **5. Corporate Plan:**

- **Conservation (C3; C5; C8):** The National Park Authority is now a member of the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre partnership and currently has a seat on the steering group. We are also full members of the Solent Forum partnership and have attended a recent conference on water quality issues.
- **External Funding (C3):** Further development with the Forestry Commission and English Nature of a potential bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. This is still in the very early stages but included a visit to the HLF in London to get feedback on our prospects. The next stage will be to apply for a project planning grant for submission in September. If successful, this would fund the work needed to prepare a full Stage 1 application which would involve wide consultation with partners and stakeholders.
- **Sustainable Development Fund (C4):** Contracts have been signed for seven of the eight approved projects and they have now started. The next panel meeting is in July and three applications have been received so far. A new version of the Fund leaflet will be printed in the near future for wide circulation around the National Park.
- **Socio-economic duty (SE 1, 2, 3) :** Steering Forest Friendly Farming project; ongoing review of the situation regarding commoners housing policy (see separate paper for this meeting);

Leader + project development and a Local Action group meeting was held.

6. **Other activities:**

- Hosted a visit by Rural Development Service staff from Defra
- Preparation of an Authority paper on the England Forestry Strategy consultation
- Preparation of a Directorate Business Plan for the year.

**Second Purpose**

7. **Partnership Working:**

- Several meetings held with partners including the National Trust, Hampshire County Council's engineers and New Forest District Council's amenities and tourism staff, building upon earlier contacts.

8. **Corporate Plan:**

- **Traffic Management (U2):** Media re-launch of New Forest Tour and work on Coach Drivers' Handbook.
- **Understanding and awareness (U3):** Initial work on boundary markers progressed to report stage – see separate paper.
- **Education programme (U4):** held introductory meeting with HCC Outdoor Education staff.
- **Recreation and Visitor Management (U6):** Proposals for enhancing the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum's Small Grant Scheme for rights of way improvements developed – see separate paper.
- **Countryside Access (U7):** The New Forest Access Forum held a successful summer workshop focusing on 'countryside access from the urban fringe'.

**Planning Policy**

9. **Partnership Working:**

- Cross organisational meetings to link the National Park Management Plan, New Forest Community Strategy and the Local Development Framework Core Strategy.

10. **Corporate Plan:**

**National Park Management Plan (A3):** Workshop session and meetings to ensure members are fully involved in the early stages on the review of the National Park Management Plan (and associated links with the Core Strategy and New Forest Community Strategy) proposed for dates in July, August and September.

**Spatial Planning Policy (A4):** Minerals and Waste Core Strategy (Submission draft) submitted to Government. The Authority's Pre-Submission draft Statement of Community Involvement currently out for consultation (comments due by 31 July).

Approval of operational guidelines for a historic building grants scheme; and launch of the scheme with press publicity. The scheme will be used to assist the cost of works to listed buildings, prominent unlisted historic buildings, historic buildings which typify the New Forest vernacular and prominent historic walls and structures.

Commencement of work on Conservation Area Management Plans and Conservation Area Appraisals for the 18 conservation areas in the Park. Involvement will be sought across the Authority as well as with external partners.

11. **Other:**

- Consultation responses completed for the Submission draft South East Plan prepared by SEERA, the draft Regional Economic Strategy prepared by SEEDA, the New Forest District Council Employment Development Plan Document, and the City of Southampton Core Strategy.
- Continuing work on the 'Acolaid' computer planning system for tree preservation orders, tree work applications and listed buildings.
- A reactive service is up and running in respect of general enquiries and planning, listed building consent and tree work applications, providing advice on trees and listed buildings and building design. The team was consulted by Development Control on 41 applications during June. Nine tree work applications were received during June (44 in total from April to June inclusive).
- Statutory protection – one building has been submitted to English Heritage for listing and three Tree Preservation Orders have been made.

**Development Control**

12. During June the Development Control unit carried out the following work:

**Planning applications: received and registered 114.** It is now taking 3 working days to register an application. In the first three months of operation since 1 April, the Authority registered 351 applications and is on course to receive the projected 1400 applications per year.

**Planning decisions: 104 issued**, of which 70 were approved (67%), 29 were refused (28%) and five were withdrawn (5%). Fourteen of these decisions were made by the Planning Development Control Committee at the meeting held on 20 June, at which there were public speakers on seven of the fourteen applications considered.

Of the 292 decisions issued between 1 April and 30 June, 74% were for approval. 62% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%) and 47% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

**Live planning applications: 326 at 30 June**, compared with 276 on 1 April.

**Appeals: nine new appeals** bringing the total number of outstanding appeals to 65. In the same period, the Authority received seven appeal decisions from the Planning Inspectorate, three of which were dismissed and four allowed. As before, all of these appeals were in respect of planning decisions taken by the predecessor authority, New Forest District Council. So far 38% of the 21 appeals determined since 1 April have been allowed.

**Enforcement: 54 new enforcement cases** were registered in June and there remain some 280 outstanding enforcement cases. The target is to reduce the number of live enforcement cases to below 200 by 1 September.

**Planning Information:** Following the discussion at the last Authority meeting, all Authority Members, Ward Councillors and Parish Councils now receive a weekly parish list of all planning decisions in addition to the weekly parish list of all new applications received. This information is sent electronically every Wednesday and posted to those Parish Councils who do not yet have access to the internet (Beaulieu, Denny Lodge, Exbury and Hale).

## **Communications**

13. Work in the Communications team has involved:

- Issuing news releases about Lyndhurst planning surgeries and the Historic Buildings Grant Scheme among others
- Organising the re-launch of the New Forest breakfast and New Forest bus tour at Exbury Gardens
- Continuing intense activity to prepare the Authority's stand for the New Forest Show
- Assisting with interviews for an Interpretation Officer and Planning Technician
- Drafting a role profile for temporary help to support development of the website

- Writing a team Business Plan for the year
- Working with colleagues in the Understanding and Enjoyment Directorate to develop key messages for use in interpretation, information and education work
- Beginning to investigate the issues of a possible trademark and sales items for the National Park
- The Corporate Plan was published on 12 July and is being distributed to all key stakeholders.

### **Member Services**

14. Member Services have been involved in facilitating preparations for Authority and committee meetings, providing committee support and following up on actions arising from the meetings.

The Section assisted with drafting reports for the Standards Committee meeting on 10 July on the Authority's complaints procedures and establishing a panel to review members' allowances. Assistance was also given to preparing the report and terms of reference for establishing the Resources and Performance Committee to be considered separately by the Authority at this meeting.

### **Corporate Services**

15. **Staffing/Recruitment:** This has been another particularly busy time for recruitment, filling vacancies in the Planning Policy Group and the Corporate Services Team, as well as staffing up the two purposes teams. Activity levels will remain high well into August and September as appointments are made and new staff join the Authority.

The following staff have **joined the Authority** since the last meeting:

- Julia Mutlow, Legal Adviser – under the Service Level Agreement with Hampshire County Council
- George Trevelyan, Business Manager

Appointments have been made, and the following staff will be joining the Authority in the first half of August:

- Lucy Page, Planning Technician
- Tony Spence, Policy Planning Officer
- Amanda Elmes, Education Officer
- Susan Roberts PA to Director of Corporate Services

and

- Jim Mitchell, Interpretation Officer will be joining the Authority on 11 September.

This will bring the total number of staff employed to 51 (48 full time equivalents).

### **Progress on recruitment:**

- Director of Corporate Services – interviews planned for 11 August
- Head of Policy and Plans – interviews planned for 25 July
- HR Manager – re-advertised, interviews planned for 2 August
- Travel and Tourism Officer, readvertised, interviews 10 August
- Recreation Officer, readvertised, interviews w/b 7 August.

The following posts in the Conservation and Enhancement Directorate were **advertised** in w/b 10 July:

- Ecologist
- Archaeologist\*
- Landscape Officer
- External Funding Officer\*

The two marked \* initially as 3 year appointments.

### **ICT**

The Geographic Information System Officer has begun optimising system data by amalgamating material from the three donating authorities into one core set of data for the Authority's use. The Authority is now producing its own **maps** fit for purpose e.g. a map for the New Forest Show.

**Remote working** has been enabled and successfully trialled from the Cottage at Queens House, with full access to all corporate systems allowing Planning Surgeries to take place (see accommodation brief, below) and for 'business continuity' purposes.

**Website** - on-line planning applications can now be viewed with their supporting documents – including plans.

Initial **Disaster Recovery** procedures are in place with documents and tapes stored remotely in a fire-proof safe.

**Members' profiles** have been updated on the Authority website to conform to "Implementing Electronic Government" requirements. Individual Member's biographies will be added as soon as they are updated.

### **Accommodation:**

An oral update will be given in the second part of the meeting.

The outcome of the Gateway 1 Review of the project to locate the Authority's permanent accommodation was helpful. As expected at this stage the overall status of the Project is Red "To achieve success the

project should take action immediately”. However the reviewers commented that

*“the project board members and team have a good understanding of the difficulties in finding suitable accommodation for the Park Authority, and have realistic expectations.”*

*“Whilst many of the recommendations are shown as Red, and are felt to be important to achieving success, the Review Team do not feel that they should be onerous and should be relatively quick to achieve.”*

The recommendations helpfully included the need to cover all stakeholder requirements in the business case – as a result of our concerns about ensuring the non-financial aspects of our accommodation needs are given due weight alongside the financial ones.

The business case, including responding to the Recommendations from the Gateway 1 Review, is in preparation.

The Project Ownership Board next meet on 24 July.

The Cottage at Queens House has been equipped to provide off-site meeting facilities and a venue for twice-weekly planning surgeries, which began on 4 July. The Authority is making these facilities available to the Forestry Commission and the Verderers, and in turn, will have access to meeting rooms in Queens House.

#### **Finance:**

The 2006-07 budget structure and financial control processes are almost complete. The second quarter’s funds were drawn down from Defra.

#### **Recommendation**

**To note the report.**