

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 20 JULY 2006

BOUNDARY MARKERS AND RELATED SIGNAGE ISSUES

Report by: Nigel Matthews, Head of Visitor Services

Summary

This paper outlines the issues surrounding boundary markers and related signage issues within the National Park; it:

- summarises the current situation and need;
- reports work in progress on criteria for suitable signage;
- outlines some possible costs; and
- seeks Members' comments and agreement to proceed with further work.

Recommendations:

- 1. That the commitment to install appropriate boundary signage is confirmed.**
- 2. That plans are developed for the installation of boundary signage as close as possible to where most A and B roads enter the National Park. Other locations, especially railway stations, will also be investigated but need not delay road signage.**
- 3. That the Authority agrees that officers should commission design work for a new New Forest National Park boundary marker, reporting back to the Authority for a decision when the work is complete.**
- 4. That the design brief states that if possible, the text New Forest National Park is used on boundary signs and that options are produced with and without the word 'welcome' included.**

5. That a Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group is formed (including representation from Members) to progress both boundary issues and related internal signage.

Resources and Corporate Plan:

There is budget provision this year of £28,000 for signage. Completion of the proposed design phase will give a clearer picture of likely costs of boundary marker provision on which decisions will be needed in due course.

Corporate Plan Objective U3 – Improve everyone’s understanding and awareness of the New Forest National Park, in particular hard to reach groups.

Other major considerations:

None

Papers:

NFNPA 112/06:	Cover paper
NFNPA 112/06 Annex 1:	Boundary markers and internal reminder sign locations
NFNPA 112/06 Annex 2:	Existing signs and examples of new/amended designs

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 A decision is needed as to whether the boundary of the New Forest National Park is to be marked on the ground and if so, what form the markers take. The provision of such markers is included in the New Forest National Park Authority Corporate Plan, and the Communications Strategy, but needs confirmation by Members in view of their significance, the potential costs and other issues outlined in the paper.
- 1.2 This paper outlines some of the issues mainly on boundary markers but also on other signs within the National Park. Even the provision of a small number of boundary markers is a complex task and the number of related branding issues is significant. Signage is also likely to be sensitive for organisations and local people so it is important that we proceed with this in mind.
- 1.3 This paper and Annexes draw on work done by several Authority staff in recent months and very positive and helpful liaison with staff from Hampshire County Council in particular. However, it reflects work in progress rather than a conclusion and a further report to Members will be provided in due course.
- 1.4 For the purposes of this paper, the terms **boundary markers/signage** refer to signs located *at* the (new) National Park boundary and the term **internal reminder sign** refers to signs located *within* the (new) National Park boundary.

2 The current situation

New Forest Committee

- 2.1 There is a wide range of existing signs which include the words 'The New Forest' and/or the logo of the New Forest Committee. The words occur along the top of many rectangular speed limit / place name signs. Signs most prominently using the New Forest Committee logo are positioned at about a dozen key locations at the start/end of 40mph

zones on both three-tiered posts and on shield-shaped signs a little further into the 40mph zones. None of these key locations is exactly on the boundary of the National Park. There are also 10-20 smaller shield-shaped signs (with the New Forest Committee logo) well within the 40mph zones. (The location of some of these signs is shown in **Annex 1** and some are illustrated in **Annex 2 (2,3)**).

Forestry Commission

- 2.2 The Forestry Commission has a large number of wooden signs. Many are site specific but others are located at the edge of the Crown Lands and say 'New Forest' together with the Forestry Commission logo. These follow the Forestry Commission's nationally approved corporate identity. (**Annex 2 (3)**).

Finger posts

- 2.3 There are a number of cast metal fingerpost signs within the National Park, and Hampshire County Council is keen to extend the use of these over time. Recently the circular finial at the top of these signs has included the logo of the New Forest Committee. A new pattern has been made so that, from now on, the National Park logo can be used instead (without the words unless this is reviewed and a new pattern prepared). (**Annex 2 (3)**).

Sign clutter

- 2.4 There is a perception that there are already too many signs and examples of 'sign clutter' are not difficult to find. Most would agree that signage should be kept to the minimum which achieves the necessary results but identifying which signs could be removed or combined will take time and careful planning since no comprehensive map or list of current signs exists. For example, some have suggested that the small shield-shaped signs could be removed but the larger ones are valued for giving targeted road safety messages. It could be argued that the process of rationalising existing signage need not delay the basic provision of boundary signage but the latter might be more palatable if it was seen to be part of the former.

3 The need for boundary markers and internal reminders

- 3.1 Ideally all visitors to the New Forest National Park, and local residents, should know when they enter the National Park. Boundary markers would create a strong and positive sense of arrival and potentially influence expectations and behaviour. Most other National Parks have boundary markers on all main access routes, plus additional signage normally associated with facilities (e.g. car parks and information boards) provided by the Authority.

- 3.2 Many journeys are wholly within the National Park so people might also usefully be reminded from time to time that they are within the National Park, whilst doing short journeys within the boundary.
- 3.3 Clearly, the existing situation described above conveys no sense of identity for the National Park and a methodical approach to replacing confusing or outdated words and logos with New Forest National Park identity is essential.
- 3.4 There will be many other additional opportunities to raise awareness of the existence of the National Park. These could include interpretative boards and literature, and with other service providers, shared branding of clothing, vehicles etc. The Forestry Commission could be key players in this discussion. Ideally, signage should be addressed quickly and need not generally be delayed by discussion about other awareness-raising issues.

Recommendation 1:

That the commitment to install appropriate boundary signage is confirmed.

4 Locations and consents

- 4.1 Most, if not all boundary and internal reminder signs will be adjacent to roads and advice would be sought from Hampshire and Wiltshire Highway Authorities about consents. Hampshire staff have indicated that they would be pleased to prepare safety audits, possibly produce and install the signs and would also be willing to install signs within Wiltshire if asked.
- 4.2 We will also liaise with the Verderers, constituent local authorities and the Forestry Commission all of whom have legitimate interests (e.g. as landowners) and useful advisory roles.
- 4.3 There are about 20 locations where A and B roads enter the National Park. Most could have boundary signs. There are an additional 100+ minor roads entering the National Park, but very few if any of these are likely to warrant boundary signage.
- 4.4 The precise positioning of each sign could only be determined after site visits and it may be that safety considerations, land ownership or road layout will mean that few signs would be exactly on the boundary. Some landscaping may be desirable at certain sites.
- 4.5 The M27 and A31 together bisect the National Park. A decision will be needed as to whether there should be boundary signage on the M27 north of Cadnam and on the A31 near Ringwood. This would involve the Highways Agency and signage would be costly. Where they exist, the 40mph zone signs can be adapted (as internal reminders) at the

exits from these roads but, for example, this would not cover traffic leaving at Cadnam and travelling south towards Lyndhurst on the A337. The A36 in the north of the National Park would also involve liaison with the Highways Agency.

- 4.6 Technically, people travelling by rail arrive within the National Park to the north of Ashurst and the south of Sway. Signage at, or outside, the stations of Ashurst, Beaulieu Road, Brockenhurst and Sway would raise awareness of the National Park to people arriving by train.
- 4.7 Neither of the ferries at Lymington and Hythe are on the boundary of the National Park but they may be close enough to be considered for some National Park signage.
- 4.8 **Annex 1** shows possible locations of new boundary markers and current locations of existing 40mph zone signs mounted on three-tiered posts, together with their associated large shield-shaped signs.

Recommendation 2:

That plans are developed for the installation of boundary signage as close as possible to where most A and B roads enter the National Park. Other locations, especially railway stations, will also be investigated but need not delay road signage.

5 Design

- 5.1 Boundary signs should be distinctive, attractive, simple and obvious without being intrusive. Elsewhere in Great Britain, National Park signs sometimes reflect local materials in their construction (hence use of granite in Dartmoor and the Cairngorms and slate in Snowdonia). Ideally they should also convey sensitivity to environmental issues and sustainability (e.g. locally made, local produce and renewable resources). Alongside this the longevity of the signs is a major factor since this will affect maintenance costs and ultimate replacement. **Annex 2 (1)** illustrates the range of current national park boundary markers in use in Great Britain.
- 5.2 The Authority faces a choice in how to progress boundary marker design. It can either embark on a full design process to develop a new and distinctive boundary marker in keeping with the National Park and its special qualities, or it can develop a marker based on existing signage (i.e. the road signs mounted on three posts).
- 5.3 As the first new National Park in England for 50 years it seems right that full consideration should be given to the **development of a new boundary marker** which should, if the Authority achieves the first national park purpose, still act as a reminder of the boundary in 50 years' time. The cost of development is not likely to be significant. The eventual cost of the markers and associated installation is uncertain –

but need not involve the six figure sums deployed in the new Scottish national parks. Developing a new marker from scratch will also take longer than developing one based on existing signage.

- 5.4 The alternative is to adopt a more pragmatic approach by **adapting the style used for existing signs**, building on their appearance and structures. So, for example, existing 40mph zone signs which include three vertical poles of different heights could form the basis. Design options are included in **Annex 2 (4)** (noting that a professional designer would be brought in to advise). Design and installation would probably proceed relatively quickly and estimates given by Hampshire County Council indicate that 20 boundary signs similar to the existing three-tiered post structures could be produced and installed for about £14,000 (this allows for signs on both sides of the road).
- 5.5 On balance, and given the time that has already elapsed since the national park was designated, it seems only right that further time and design input is given to developing a new and distinctive boundary marker for the New Forest National Park, subject to potential costs involved which will be revealed at the end of the design stage. Should the costs prove prohibitive, the option to adapt existing signage remains open.

Recommendation 3:

That the Authority agrees that officers should commission design work for a new New Forest National Park boundary marker, reporting back to the Authority for a decision when the work is complete.

6 Messages to be conveyed

- 6.1 The image within the National Park logo (i.e. the tree and ponies) conveys a strong 'New Forest' message. Where possible, the use of the *full* logo should nevertheless include the words 'New Forest National Park'.
- 6.2 In some circumstances, and possibly on boundary markers, additional text could be added as a 'tagline'. At least one other National Park and many local authorities add the word 'welcome' to their signage. The question is whether the words should be included on the boundary markers? On the one hand this is likely to increase the size, and complexity of design (and possibly cost) of the markers. On the other hand, visitors should feel welcome and making the statement on boundary signage will help ensure both these aspects are to the fore.

Recommendation 4:

That the design brief states that if possible, the text 'New Forest National Park' is used on boundary signs and that options are produced with and without the word 'welcome' included.

7 Next steps

- 7.1 The work on boundary markers – and other internal signage – should be taken forward in full consultation with *key stakeholders* and some members, acting in an advisory capacity. Some have a direct interest, e.g. Forestry Commission and the Highways authorities. A Group would ensure effective liaison and tap into existing knowledge and expertise, notably in Hampshire County Council and the Forestry Commission. The advisory group can take forward work on the design brief and also begin consideration of internal signage requirements, and design, and on the question of dual branding which is key to some organisations in the National Park. The Group would report back as appropriate to the full Authority.
- 7.2 No further *public consultation* is considered necessary as stakeholders were involved in the development of the of logo and boundary markers and other signage will be based on that logo.

Recommendation 5:

That a Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group is formed (including representation from Members) to progress both boundary issues and related internal signage.

8 Costs

- 8.1 £28,000 has been allocated for signage in the Authority 2006/7 budget. This will cover the cost of design work and some (or all) of the costs of new boundary markers. If costs look to exceed budgetary provision, virements may be possible if there are unspent budgets, or phased development spreading costs over more than one year could be considered.