

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 20 JULY 2006

NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW: UPDATE ON THE PROCESS AND TIMETABLE

Report by: Nick Evans, Senior Planning Officer (Management Plan)

Summary:

The National Park Management Plan is the central strategic policy document for the National Park and the National Park Authority. The preparation of the new Plan is the first opportunity for the Authority carefully to consider the longer term priorities for the National Park, and engage all relevant partners and stakeholders in that process.

This report:

- i) updates members on progress to date;
- ii) discusses opportunities and constraints for joint working with the Local Development Framework and Community Strategy processes; and
- iii) outlines the proposed future stages for consultation on the Management Plan and its final production.

Recommendations:

That the Authority

- a) **endorses the views of the Design Group relating to the overall 'look' of the final Management Plan and the range of stakeholder interests to be involved in the process;**
- b) **continues to support the principle of joint work on the three processes, but notes the points made relating to the particular requirements of the Management Plan process;**
- c) **agrees the preliminary consultation work required, and that a 'key partners steering group' is established to manage the Plan preparation, comprising the National Park Authority, Forestry Commission, Verderers and Natural England;**

- d) **endorses an inclusive approach to stakeholder involvement and agrees that specialist consultants should be commissioned to design the process in more detail; and**
- e) **notes the broad outline of the public consultation and final approval stages of the Management Plan, to be worked up in more detail for future agreement.**

Resources and Corporate Plan:

Officer time, research costs, stakeholder consultation, document production and publicity.

Corporate Plan Objective A2 – Provide a clear up-to-date framework for the management of the New Forest National Park by working with partners to review and replace the Interim Management Plan.

Other considerations:

Links with the timing and scope of other relevant strategies and plans.

Papers:

NFNPA 116/06: cover paper

NFNPA 116/06: Annex 1 – outline programme and purposes of consultation

Background papers:

NFNPA 48/05

National Park Management Plans – Guidance (Countryside Agency, Oct. 2005)

New Forest National Park Authority Interim Management Plan (2003)

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Authority paper of 15 December 2005 (48/05) outlined the major considerations in producing the first statutory Management Plan for the New Forest National Park. Members are referred to the main points contained in that paper:

- a Management Plan for the New Forest National Park must be produced and agreed by April 2009;
- the Plan should be the overall strategic policy document for the Park, and should focus specifically on the delivery of National Park purposes;
- the Plan process, although led by the National Park Authority, should directly involve and achieve ownership of the range of organisations and communities with an interest in the area;
- the adopted interim National Park Management Plan, published three years ago, brings together much previous thinking on New Forest issues and policies, and therefore provides a good starting point for the new Plan; and
- wherever possible the work on the Management Plan should be joined up with the production of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy and the review of the New Forest District Community Strategy.

1.2 This paper updates members on the preparatory work undertaken so far, examines some of the issues arising from the process, and seeks approval for the broad approach suggested for future consultation stages.

2 Guidance from members design group

- 2.1 An advisory design group of Authority members met on 24 February 2006 to discuss the 'look' of the final Management Plan in very broad terms, and the range of partners and stakeholders who should be involved in the process.
- 2.2 The group suggested that the final Plan should:
- be a relatively short, strategic document, clearly integrating related topic areas;
 - have a strong 'New Forest' feel and identity;
 - be evidence-based; and
 - inspire change through ambitious policies for the National Park.
- 2.3 In terms of partner and stakeholder engagement, the group noted the need to involve a wide range of interests. These included National Park Authority members and officers, statutory bodies and other major partners, local stakeholders, specific 'hard-to-reach' groups, communities (including those outside the Park) and visitors. It was felt that the process should make full use of existing consultative forums, such as the Consultative Panel.

Recommendation:

That the Authority endorses the views of the design group relating to the overall 'look' of the final Management Plan and the range of stakeholder interests to be involved in the process.

3 Joining up the processes

Overall approach

- 3.1 A joint officers group has been looking in detail at the practicalities of joining up the Management Plan, Local Development Framework and Community Strategy processes. This is a small group comprising representatives from New Forest District Council (planning policy and community strategy), National Park Authority (planning policy and management plan) and the Local Strategic Partnership (community strategy).
- 3.2 The overall purpose is to ensure that all three plans contain complementary policies, recognise that many 'New Forest' issues cross geographical boundaries and help stakeholders to understand the relationship between the three processes.
- 3.3 It should be noted that the timetable for the joint work is largely determined by the timetable for the Local Development Framework Core Strategy, which has already been approved by the Authority.

Joint Issues and Options Paper

- 3.4 The first major piece of joint work planned is a 'New Forest Issues and Options Paper', to be produced for public consultation and launched at a jointly organised stakeholder event in early November 2006.
- 3.5 It is considered essential that Authority members have the opportunity for dialogue and direct input into this consultation paper as it is being drafted, to ensure key issues of particular relevance to the National Park are included, and that members are happy with the emerging paper as a contribution to the Management Plan process. A number of events for members have therefore been arranged - see 4.4 below.

Further joint work

- 3.6 The results of the 'Issues and Options' consultation will be used in different ways by the different processes, and should be seen as an overall 'pot' of issues on which to draw as the three plans are developed further.
- 3.7 From the point of view of the Management Plan it is suggested that the work is used as a starting point for more detailed discussion on National Park issues and policies by a wide range of stakeholders early next year.
- 3.8 The high degree of emphasis placed on direct stakeholder participation in the Management Plan process differs from the consultation approach being taken by the other two processes. Nevertheless there may be opportunities for additional joint consultation work and this will be considered further by officers. It will certainly be essential to test the compatibility of objectives and policies at key stages in the preparation of the three plans.

Recommendation:

That the Authority continues to support the principle of joint work on the three processes, but notes the points made relating to the particular requirements of the Management Plan process.

4 Key stages in the Management Plan timetable

- 4.1 The Management Plan process has been divided into four main stages for ease of reference, based on the indicative timetable contained in the Authority paper of 15 December 2005. These stages are shown in illustrative form in **Annex 1**. Further reports will be brought to members as the early stages are completed and later phases of the project are worked up in more detail.

Preliminary consultation work - July to November 2006

- 4.2 This comprises initial work within the Authority and with the main statutory bodies. The purpose is to reach a view on a draft Vision and the key issues for the New Forest, to be used as the starting point for wider stakeholder participation.
- 4.3 The National Park Authority is still a relatively new organisation. Members and staff have not yet had the opportunity to discuss and clarify an Authority approach to the major issues faced by the Park as a whole, and the ways these could be addressed.
- 4.4 A series of events have therefore been arranged over the next three months, and Members are urged to attend wherever possible. Details have been circulated in the Members Bulletin.

Event	Date and time	Venue
Vision for the New Forest	20 July	Wellow Village Hall (following Authority meeting)
Key issues for the National Park	7 August 2pm-5pm	Efford House
Options for addressing the issues	23 August 10am-1pm	Efford House
Joint members workshop (with New Forest District Council and the Local Strategic partnership) on 'New Forest Issues and Options Paper'	TBA	TBA

- 4.5 It is also considered important that the key statutory bodies are involved at this early stage, to begin to develop their commitment to the Management Plan and to its delivery once completed.
- 4.6 Members of the Statutory Bodies Liaison Group, comprising senior officer representatives from fifteen organisations, are aware of the Management Plan process in broad terms, and have been involved in visioning work and commenting on key issues from their points of view. They will be asked to provide further input at various stages, as appropriate.
- 4.7 It is considered that the Forestry Commission, Verderers of the New Forest and Natural England have a particularly important role to play in helping to steer the Management Plan work and contributing a true partnership approach to the process. This is in line with the Minister's

Guidance to the National Park Authority and with the specific historical, legal and land management interests of these organisations.

Recommendation:

That the Authority agrees the preliminary consultation work required, and that a 'key partners steering group' is established to manage the Plan preparation, comprising the National Park Authority, Forestry Commission, Verderers and Natural England.

Stakeholder involvement – November 2006 to April 2007

- 4.8 There is likely to be a high level interest in this first statutory National Park Management Plan from a range of stakeholder and partner organisations, and it is essential that they are fully involved in the process. In addition every effort should be made to include interests which traditionally have been less involved in the decision-making process (for instance young people, disability and ethnic minority groups, coastal interests, visitors).
- 4.9 The results of the stakeholder involvement work will inform a draft Management Plan for general public consultation.
- 4.10 It is suggested that the stakeholder participation work on the Management Plan should include:
- a workshop to launch the 'New Forest Issues and Options Paper' in early November (joint event);
 - topic based 'focus groups' to consider issues and policies in more detail;
 - targeted events aimed at 'hard-to-reach' groups;
 - consultation with existing stakeholder forums such as the New Forest Consultative Panel, New Forest Access Forum and others; and
 - a concluding workshop to bring together the topic-based work and develop a shared Vision and objectives.
- 4.11 To get the most out of these events it is important that they are carefully designed and have a clear purpose. Members, officers and statutory body representatives will have an important role to play, but it is suggested that specialist consultancy advice should be sought regarding the design of the process overall.
- 4.12 It is planned that the 'Issues and Options' event in November will be hosted jointly with New Forest District Council and the Local Strategic Partnership. It is not yet clear if further joint work with stakeholders on issues and options will be possible within the current programme for the Local Development Framework. However any major additional points raised through this part of the Management Plan process will inform the 'preferred options' stage of the Local Development Framework (timetabled for April 2007).

Recommendation:

That the Authority endorses an inclusive approach to stakeholder involvement and agrees that specialist consultants should be commissioned to design the process in more detail.

Public consultation - July to October 2007

- 4.13 The consultation draft of the Management Plan will bring together the work with members, partners and stakeholders. It will require further input from Authority members prior to publication and comprehensive publicity to raise awareness and encourage comments from all those who may be interested.

Approval and publication of the final draft – January to March 2008

- 4.14 Following an analysis of consultation responses a final draft of the Management Plan will be produced for formal adoption by the National Park Authority, endorsement by the statutory bodies and approval by Government.

Recommendation:

That the Authority notes the broad outline of the public consultation and final approval stages of the Management Plan, to be worked up in more detail for future agreement.

5 Sustainability Appraisal, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment

- 5.1 A combined Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment is a statutory requirement in producing the Management Plan. The purpose is to test rigorously the sustainability and environmental impacts of plan policies.

- 5.2 In addition, it is now clear that an Appropriate Assessment will be needed under European law to ensure the Management Plan policies will not result in negative impacts on European Sites of nature conservation importance. The Appropriate Assessment must be agreed by Natural England.

- 5.3 In view of the close links between the Management Plan and Local Development Framework Core Strategy there is likely to be scope for joint working on at least some aspects of the Sustainability Appraisal and the Appropriate Assessment. This will be investigated further by officers.

6 Resource implications

- 6.1 Further work is needed to clarify the resource requirements for the work outlined in this paper.
- 6.2 Costs will depend largely on the final details of the consultation process, the degree to which the work can be carried out jointly with New Forest District Council and the extent to which external consultants are used to advise on design and produce the Sustainability Appraisal and Appropriate Assessment.

7 Risks to delivery

- 7.1 Members will note that the current timetable, influenced by the need to link with the Local Development Framework programme, will not be easy to achieve. Slippage on delivery is a real danger due to a number of current 'unknowns', including:
 - detailed design of the participatory stages of both processes;
 - resource implications, particularly relating to officer time;
 - further evidence gathering which may become apparent during the process;
 - the amount of joint work which is possible; and
 - additional work which Authority members may identify (in terms of their own input and those of others) to make the process more robust.
- 7.2 Officers will draw members attention to issues which are likely to have serious implications for the project timetable as they arise, together with suggested solutions for discussion.