

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 16 NOVEMBER 2006

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

Summary:

Work is gearing up in the two purposes directorates as new specialist staff arrive and steady progress is being made in the planning section with encouraging improvements in performance. Much remains to be done to complete the 'development' of the Authority. Work on developing next year's Corporate Plan is beginning to slip.

Recommendation:

To note the report.

Resources:

Routine

Paper:

NFNPA 135/06: Cover paper

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1. This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 21 September for all work except planning development control and enforcement – which covers activity in September and October. Work is gearing up in the two purposes directorates as new specialist staff arrive and steady progress is being made in the planning section with encouraging improvements in performance. Much remains to be done to complete the 'development' of the Authority. Work on developing next year's Corporate Plan is beginning to slip.

MEMBERS

2. Some members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events:
 - Resources and Performance Committee – informal briefing, 26 September
 - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 17 October
 - Workshop on a Marine National Park, 24 October
 - Workshop on National Park Management Plan and Local Development Framework Core Strategy, 1 November
 - New Forest Consultative Panel meeting, 2 November
 - Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 8 November
 - First meeting of the Independent Remuneration Panel to review members' allowances – member interviews, 9 November
 - Council for National Parks Meeting, Birmingham, 14 November
 - SEERA Plenary, 15 November
3. Forthcoming activities include:
 - Second meeting of the Independent Remuneration Panel to review members' allowances, 17 November
 - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 21 November
 - Hampshire and Isle of Wight Improvement Partnership: Improvement Board, 24 November
 - Standards Committee, 27 November
 - Workshop on pony paddocks, 30 November

- New Forest District Local Strategic Partnership, 8 December
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 14 December
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 19 December
- New Forest Consultative Panel meeting, 4 January
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 16 January
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 18 January

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

First Purpose

4. Corporate Plan:

- **Commoning and farming (C1):** Discussions have been held with a group of commoners to identify how the commoners might wish to undertake the Commoning Review. A separate report is made at Agenda item 14 (Paper NFNPA 142/06).
- **Sustainable Development (SE1) and Business and Employment (SE3):** The Authority had a stand at the local business advice roadshow, supported by the New Forest Business Partnership. Staff provided information and advice on the Sustainable Development Fund and a range of green business issues such as waste and energy policies. Discussions have also been held with the Environment Centre in Southampton and New Forest District Council to discuss potential joint working.
- **Landscape Conservation (C2):** The Directorate organised a joint workshop between the Solent Protection Society and Members to discuss the potential for a Marine National Park in the West Solent area. The meeting was well received and sparked a lively debate about the pros and cons of the proposal and indeed whether such an additional designation was necessary. The Authority will be asked for its views on the issue in Spring 2007. The meeting was also an opportunity to update members on the likely timetable and consultation arrangements for the next round of Shoreline Management Plans (SMP2). This process will be lead and coordinated by New Forest District Council and is likely to start early in 2007.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England has launched a new map of tranquillity in England. This uses 45 weighted (the weightings are informed by a public consultation about what tranquillity means to people) GIS data sets to map tranquillity across the country. The Directorate is now considering whether it would be appropriate for the Authority to adopt the same methodology. A tranquillity map was produced for the New Forest in the 1990s using a less refined methodology and Corporate Plan Objective C2 is to repeat this

study to help inform our management policies to protect and enhance tranquillity where possible.

5. **Other activities:**

- As part of preparing Report NFNPA 143/06 (Agenda item 15) officers also visited Dorset County Council to meet their corporate sustainability officer and look at their environmental policy and practices. Early discussions have also been held with the Forestry Commission about what the Authority might be able to do to facilitate and promote the use of wood fuel.

Second Purpose

6. **Partnership working:**

- Invitations to tender were prepared and issued for a study into a closer association between the Authority and the Ninth Centenary Trust (New Forest Museum at Lyndhurst). The contract has been awarded to a consultant – Derek Langslow – and the report is due before Christmas.
- Meetings with other National Park staff, including Tourism and Communications Officers to discuss common issues, and Access Officers for briefing on rights of way changes arising out of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act.
- Planning of the 2007 litter campaign with Forestry Commission and New Forest District Council.
- Day with Forestry Commission staff exploring education, interpretation and outreach opportunities.

7. **Corporate Plan:**

- **Recreation Strategy (U1):** Work is being progressed on the preparation of a draft project brief for the recreation and visitor management strategy.
- **Traffic Management (U2):** Planning of further improvements to the New Forest Tour Bus service for 2007, including enhanced information for passengers, marketing, revised livery and route changes; input to Coach Drivers' Handbook.
- **Understanding and awareness (U3):** Initial planning of interpretative projects, research into content and design of interpretation panels and information gathering for populating the website. Discussion of branding issues with the Forestry Commission. Planning input to *New Forest Focus*. Research and discussions taking forward boundary marker and removal of sign clutter work

- **Education programme (U4):** Meetings with, and attendance at events organised by education service providers (New Forest and St Barbe museums, Countryside Education Trust, Minstead, Tile Barn, Forestry Commission). Pilot delivery of an education activity to a visiting university group. Preparation of policies and procedures for working with educational groups.
- **Recreation and Visitor Management (U6):** First Small Grant Scheme proposal for a map board providing information about rights of way in Rockbourne Parish approved. Financial assistance given towards completion of a cycle route along an ancient trackway between Keyhaven and Lymington.

8. **Other activities:**

- Briefing from the Solent Forum Officer and attendance at the Solent Forum recreation workshop.
- Introduction to the work of the Geodata Institute at the University of Southampton.
- Representation at an increasing number and range of meetings, including New Forest Transport Forum and New Forest Road Safety Committee, Shout About 2006 (young people's conference), New Forest Tourism Association Marketing Committee, Blashford Lakes Forum, PROGRESS project surgeries.
- Comments made on the Hampshire County Council draft road maintenance plan.

Planning Policy

9. **Corporate Plan:**

- **Working with partners to achieve National Park purposes (A2):** Staff met Laura Garrod from South East Protected Landscapes on 30 October. Among other matters discussed was the preparation of evidence for the South East Plan Examination, where the National Park Authority and South East Protected Landscapes are due to attend the same session.
- **Partnership working (A3):** Cross organisational meetings to link the review of the National Park Management Plan, the New Forest District Community Strategy and the Local Development Framework Core Strategy.

The team continues to work on developing the joint New Forest National Park Authority and New Forest District Issues and Options paper, the first stage in the development of the joint Core Strategy. This involves close integration with the review of the National Park Management Plan being led by Nick Evans and the District's Community Strategy. The first stage of public consultation is programmed for November/December 2006.

- **Spatial planning policies (A4):** Consultation with the Wiltshire residents on extending the submitted Hampshire Minerals and Waste Core Strategy into the Wiltshire part of the National Park (thus providing a consistent policy framework across the whole Park) has been a major task. Consultation with the Wiltshire communities runs until Wednesday 6 December, with all the relevant consultation documents available on the planning policy section of the Authority's website.

Linked to this, staff attended the Pre-Examination Meeting at Hampshire County Council for the Minerals and Waste Core Strategy. The examination is due to open in late January 2007, with the binding inspector's report expected by around May 2007.

The Authority's Submission draft Statement of Community Involvement has been submitted to the Secretary of State (5 October) and is out for consultation until 20 November 2006. This sets out how the Authority will consult people during the production of planning documents and the consideration of planning applications. A government-appointed Planning Inspector will consider the representations received in the new year, before preparing a binding adoption report for the Authority.

Work has begun on preparing the Authority's final submissions to the South East Plan Examination. The Authority has been invited to appear at various sessions between 17–26 January 2007, on issues including the coast and countryside (including the New Forest National Park policy); the South Hampshire proposals for growth; housing and the countryside; and infrastructure.

Staff from the Policy and Plans team met New Forest District Council officers and the Government Office for the South East to develop the proposals contained within their respective Local Development Schemes.

- **Design Guidance (C7):** Staff are continuing to put together a framework for a Conservation Area Management Plan which will cover all conservation areas in the Park and at the same time are looking at the extent of existing conservation areas.

Work is continuing on design guidance for new agricultural buildings.

10. **Other:**

- Work continues on the Acolaid planning system in respect of tree preservation orders and managing tree work applications. The IT team continue to make good progress in ironing out problems.
- A normal reactive service continues to be provided 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 had been consulted by Development Control on 22 applications during October. Twenty five tree work applications were received during October and six determined, all within eight weeks of registration.
- Work is continuing on text and illustrative material for the Park's website.
- Paula Freeland attended the annual meeting of National Park Historic Environment Forum Managers. This is a well organised group with an agreed statement of objectives and associated action plan. Each park reports annually on their achievement of objectives against the action plan. The meeting was positive and informative and resulted in a number of joint projects across the parks being agreed. We will be continuing involvement in a project looking at the socio-economic benefits of heritage conservation in National Parks. Scoping stage at present. Also in a review of the previously mentioned action plan.
- Martin Poole gave a presentation on "*Local distinctiveness in buildings of the New Forest*" at the New Forest Museum to the adult evening lecture group. It illustrated the types of building which typify the New Forest and how they should be valued and protected.

Development Control

11. During September and October the Development Control unit carried out the following work:

Planning applications: received and registered 187. Applications continue to be registered within two to three working days following receipt. The Authority remains on course to receive the projected 1,400 planning applications per year.

Planning decisions: 222 issued, of which 150 were approved (66%), and 72 were refused (34%). 19 (9%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Development Control Committee at the meetings held on 19 September and 17 October.

71% of householder applications (155) were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%) – representing a 2% improvement on the preceding two months (July and August) and 58% of minor applications (67) were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%) – representing a 11% improvement on the preceding two months.

Live planning applications: 275 at 31 October, compared with 338 at 31 August.

Appeals: 21 new appeals bringing the total number of outstanding appeals as of 31 October to 66. In the same period, the Authority received 20 appeal decisions from the Planning Inspectorate, 16 of which were dismissed and four allowed. Four of these decisions were against decisions made by the Authority, three were dismissed and one was allowed.

Enforcement: 76 new enforcement cases were registered in September and October and as of 31 October there are some 270 outstanding enforcement cases (the backlog of work having been reduced by some 30 cases). The guidance note 'Planning Enforcement – Policy and Practice' is the subject of a separate paper on this agenda (**Paper NFNPA 144/06**)

Communications

12. Work in the Communications team has included:

- Continuing a joint litter awareness initiative with the Forestry Commission and New Forest District Council
- Continuing to publicise the initiative to put power lines underground jointly with Scottish and Southern Energy and the Forestry Commission
- Developing the website, with substantial improvements in the News, About Us and Living In sections
- Preparing sound material from the New Forest Show for use on the website
- Publication of an interim 'web protocol' for staff
- Writing and seeing through design, print and production the second edition of the *Park Life* newsletter
- Working with the Understanding and Enjoyment team to prepare content for the 2007 *Forest Focus* visitor newspaper in conjunction with the Forestry Commission
- Initial work on the next stage of developing the National Park's corporate identity
- Final work to organise national press visits to the National Park in the autumn
- Continued work towards establishing an in-house photo library
- Briefing for the Agisters
- Advising on the consultation approach for special qualities work

- Initial work to produce a National Park Authority Christmas card
- Regular work answering media queries, writing news releases, producing *The Update*, responding to talks requests and answering queries via the enquiries e-mail address

Member Services

13. Member Services have been involved in facilitating preparations for Authority and committee meetings, providing committee and member support and following up on actions arising from the meetings. In particular the Authority has assisted with the first meeting of the new Resources and Performance Committee of the Authority.
14. Member Services has been involved in making arrangements for and providing support to the first meeting of the Independent Remuneration Panel established to review the Scheme of Members' Allowances.
15. Other work undertaken by the Section included assisting in updating information on the Authority's website, reviewing draft policies on access to information and the draft publication scheme, monitoring complaints received by the Authority, developing the members' training programme and assisting with identifying Authority and committee meeting dates for 2007.

Corporate Services

16. Business Support Office

- The **Members' Room** next to the Library has now been equipped with PCs and is operational.
- A 'Novac' **fire suppressant system** has been installed in the archive filing store
- The **Asset Register** has been updated and asset tags are being fixed to each registered item.

17. Human Resources

- The work on developing the Authority **HR policies** is progressing rapidly with drafts at different stages of preparation prior to full consultation with all staff. Staff pay is not included in this work
- The Authority is now nearing the end of the **recruitment programme** to obtain a full complement of staff. As of 31 October 2006 there were 56 permanent members of staff (52.6 full-time equivalents). When recruitment is complete the predicted staff compliment will be 64 (60.2 full time equivalents) of whom six will be in fixed term contracts. This is significantly below the 80 staff predicted when the Authority was established.
- In October and November the following staff were recruited:

Monitoring and Enforcement Officer: Jane Cooper, joined 23 October

Receptionist: Jane Dunford, joined 30 October

Administrative Officer - Member Services: Rosalind Alderman, joined 30 October

Administrative Assistant - Member Services: Carolyn Hoole, joined 30 October

P/T Administrative Assistant – Communications: Celia Barker, joined 6 November

Development Control Planner (six month contract): Yasir Kayani, joined 6 November

Office Services Administrator: Sharon Wilcockson, joined 13 November

- Barry Holland joined the Authority as the new Director of Corporate Services on 13 November.
- Interviews take place on 17 November for P/A to the Chief Executive and Chairman.
- A review of workloads and staffing in the planning section has been completed and the results will be considered by the Management Board in November.

18. ICT

- The Authority's **planning system** contract has now moved into 'maintenance' for support purposes.
- The Head of ICT and Systems Support Officer will receive system administrator training on the **website** shortly. This will assist with getting the Authority's new Intranet site started (it is intended to look and work in a similar way to the current internet site) and making additional functionality available on the internet site i.e. adding sound files etc.
- An **Acceptable Use and Security Policy for PCs** has been developed for staff and has been approved by the Senior Management Team. A similar policy will now be created for members' PCs.
- During November work will commence on **merging GIS layers** affecting Planning Development Control Constraints. Currently there are three layers (one from each of the contributing authorities) which is workable however the planning GIS will be more efficient when there is a single layer.
- The **Internet GIS** requirements have been defined and work will commence during November toward completing the Authority's initial GIS web presence.
- A new project (the Document and Records Management Project) is being established which will replace the Authority's current paper and electronic filing practices with an electronically-based corporate

practice which is consistent in its application by all staff.

19. **Finance and Performance**

Work has involved:

- Preparation of papers for the first Resources and Performance Committee – see Agenda items 10 and 11.
- Working closely with the Chief Finance Officer on **budget management** issues for the current year, and preparation of the draft **financial strategy for the next three years**.
- Preparation of a draft Service Level Agreement for provision of financial services with New Forest District Council (from 1 April 2006).
- Discussion of the broader **funding issues** with Defra, including developing terms of reference for a study of the Authority's future funding needs.

Recommendation

To note the report.