

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 16 NOVEMBER 2006

COMMONING REVIEW

Report by: Emma Rigglesworth, Head of Sustainable Development

Summary:

This paper provides an update on progress with setting up the commoner led review.

Recommendations:

That the National Park Authority notes the progress with setting up the commoning review and supports the approach being taken.

Resources:

Officer time and budget of up to £10,000

Corporate Plan objective C1: Develop strategies and support schemes to help sustain agriculture and promote thriving commoning activity that is in keeping with the New Forest National Park.

Papers:

NFNPA 142/06:	Cover paper
NFNPA 142/06:	Annex 1 – Extract from Corporate Plan
NFNPA 142/06:	Annex 2 – Steering Group – terms of reference

Contact:

Emma Rigglesworth
Tel: 01590 646676
Email: emma.rigglesworth@newforestnpa.gov.uk

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**AUTHORITY MEETING – 16 NOVEMBER 2006****COMMONING REVIEW****1 Introduction**

- 1.1 Traditional grazing by livestock under the commoning system not only underpins the conservation of the National Park's landscape and wildlife but is a key part of the area's cultural heritage in its own right. Commoning is essential to achieving the Authority's first purpose but is vulnerable in the longer term and its continuation depends on sustaining all aspects of the commoning community.
- 1.2 The development of strategies and support schemes to achieve this was rated as of the highest priority at the Authority's stakeholder event which was attended by over 100 people in December 2005.
- 1.3. The Authority's Corporate Plan recognises the importance of commoning in objective C1 which sets out a number of actions to further this aim (see **Annex 1**).

2 The Commoning Review

- 2.1 A review of all aspects of commoning provides a helpful starting point to enable the Authority to determine how best it can contribute to the long term sustainability of the practice. The Authority's Corporate Plan provides more detail on how this might be achieved.
- 2.2 Of key importance is the principle that the review should be commoner led. The benefits of this approach include:
 - a rich source of experience and expertise
 - greater understanding of the issues affecting commoners
 - stakeholder support for outcomes.
- 2.3 Accordingly a small group of commoners including representatives from the Verderers of the New Forest, the Commoners' Defence Association and a member of the Authority were brought together to consider how this might be best achieved.
- 2.4 Early discussions have focused on setting up a structure to manage and undertake the review. This will comprise four 'topic' groups which feed

into an over-arching steering group, chaired by the Official Verderer. The four proposed topic areas are as follows:

- Topic 1 planning, housing and back-up land
- Topic 2 statutory recognition for commoning and future financing of the Verderers
- Topic 3 education and awareness raising including potential conflicts between recreation and commoning
- Topic 4 open forest grazing needs and conservation, financial returns, young people.

2.5 The draft terms of reference for the steering and topic groups are attached at **Annex 2**. The group agreed that the wider commoning community would be consulted, prior to confirming these arrangements to ensure that as many commoners as possible have an opportunity to air their views and take part if they wish. It is intended that the steering group complete its final recommendations by 30 June 2007. This will allow the recommendation to be fed into the development of the National Park Management Plan.

2.6 In its discussions, the group highlighted the importance of building on the abundance of knowledge which already exists within the commoning community, a considerable amount of which is contained within existing reports and research. Appraisal of current and past schemes to determine their benefit to the long term sustainability of commoning would add and update this knowledge. Opportunities to look at other practices e.g. crofting were discussed along with the need to ensure creative thinking. Further research to fill in gaps in knowledge may be required and this would require a budget. Facilitation and support for group work may also need to be supported financially. Administrative and technical support would be provided by Authority staff where required.

2.7 Ensuring that all commoners and in particular the younger generation of commoners are properly represented and consulted with was seen as essential. Difficulties associated with attending meetings in a voluntary capacity were highlighted and the suggestion made that support for attending meetings may need to be provided e.g. expenses.

3 Current initiatives

3.1 Prior to the outcome of the review, there is considerable scope in the shorter term for the Authority to provide practical assistance to the commoning community through staff resources and essential small scale financial support. This is in addition to that already provided through the Authority's involvement in Forest Friendly Farming. Projects supported to

date include new vehicles for the agisters. Future projects include support for completing the pound building programme and a project to provide hand held portable radio systems with remote speak microphones for the agisters. It is proposed that these projects are jointly funded by LEADER+, the Verderers and the Authority, subject to approval by the LEADER+ Local Action Group.

- 3.2 In the longer term work to develop the Heritage Lottery Fund bid and potential future LEADER funds available through the next Rural Development Programme for England (2007-2013) will draw on the experience and information coming from the review and could potentially draw in further finances for the longer term.

4 Recommendation:

That the National Park Authority notes the progress with setting up the commoning review and supports the approach being taken.

NFNPA 142/06 Annex 1

C1 Develop strategies and support schemes to help sustain agriculture and promote thriving commoning activity that is in keeping with the New Forest National Park (MP 4.1b, 4.1g and Defra a)			
Current position	Action in 2006-2007	When	Action in 2007-2008 and beyond
<p>Policies in existing Local Plans support commoners' housing</p> <p>Forest Friendly Farming (FFF) provides practical support for commoning through e.g. the New Forest Countryside Stewardship Scheme and the New Forest Apprenticeship Scheme</p> <p>Key documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The report of the working party on grazing in the New Forest (The Illingworth Report) 1991 - The marketing of New Forest Livestock (ADAS Consulting, for the Verderers 1998) - A review of the loss of commonable grazing land in the New Forest (Cox and Reeves, 2000) - An analysis of land use within the parishes of Hythe and Dibden and Marchwood by New Forest Commoners (Cox and Sevier for the New Forest Committee, 2002) - Commoners Housing Review 2005 (New Forest Association, Hampshire Wildlife Trust and The Commoners' Defence Association) 	<p>Review how existing and new National Park Authority policies affect commoning and farming as part of the Local Development Framework and Management Plan process <i>Link to A2 and A4</i></p>	Dec	Implement the findings of the review
	<p>Establish a commoner-led review of existing support arrangements and develop new policies and actions that improve the sustainability of commoning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - assess recent studies and research to evaluate the current situation - establish opportunities for commoners to discuss their views of the issues affecting Commoning with the National Park directly - review the effectiveness of existing strategies and policies to identify potential barriers and blockages - identify further opportunities and plan actions required to support commoning - consult stakeholders on policies, priorities and options for delivery - complete the draft review as part of the input to the Management Plan 	Dec	Implement the findings of the review

C1 Develop strategies and support schemes to help sustain agriculture and promote thriving commoning activity that is in keeping with the New Forest National Park (MP 4.1b, 4.1g and Defra a) (cont)			
	<p>Continue support for existing initiatives such as New Forest Marque, New Forest Farmers and Producers Markets to ensure they meet agreed targets</p> <p>Establish a farmer and landowner liaison group to develop further initiatives</p>	On-going	Ongoing
	Support the purchase of five Land Rovers for the Verderers/Agisters	June	Ongoing until 2011

Commoning Review

Steering Group – Terms of Reference:

1. To appraise the aims and effectiveness of the measures already taken to safeguard the practice of commoning in the New Forest
2. To consider whether these measures need to be supported, changed or developed
3. To identify whether further measures may be necessary to ensure commoning is sustainable in the long term
4. To offer all practicing commoners the opportunity to get involved with this review
5. To make recommendations to the National Park Authority and other appropriate bodies to act on and for inclusion within the National Park Management Plan
6. To report back to the National Park Authority by 30 June 2007

Topic Groups - Terms of Reference

1. To examine and appraise existing research, studies and initiatives
2. To identify any gaps in knowledge, commissioning new research if required
3. To recruit or involve any persons/organisations which may contribute to achieving the aims of the topic group (in particular young people)
4. To make recommendations on key issues and solutions
5. To produce interim reports to the Steering Group (to a timetable to be set up by the Steering Group)
6. To report back to the Steering Group by 1 May 2007