

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUTHORITY MEETING – 15 DECEMBER 2005**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive/National Park Officer

Summary:

Another month of steady progress notwithstanding a number of staff changes. The lease for South Efford House has been signed, an advance party of staff is now located there and plans for the move are well advanced.

Recommendation:

To **note** the report.

Resources:

The period up until end January is likely to be very testing in terms of staff constraints. A number of staff on loan have now left the Authority and new appointees are not due to arrive until January, while at the same time there is a heavy workload on the development programme, the transfer of planning functions, on-going recruitment and the implementation of the ICT Strategy, as well as developing the Corporate Plan and preparing the 2006/7 Budget.

Other major considerations:

None.

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1. This report describes progress since the last Authority meeting on 15 November 2005. Another month of steady progress although the departure of staff on loan and annual leave arrangements have continued to put significant pressure on existing and new staff. New staff have also attended training events. Major effort has focussed on the preparation of the Corporate Plan and in particular organisation of the Stakeholder event, the launch of the Sustainable Development Fund, the transfer of planning project – with some additional resource being recruited in, the implementation of the ICT Strategy and the move to South Efford House, plus work on the Local Development Scheme alongside preparing responses to a range of regional and sub-regional planning policy documents.

Members

2. Some members have attended the following meetings and events:
 - the fourth meeting of the Transfer of Planning Functions Project Steering Group on 5 December;
 - the first meeting of the Standards Committee on 7 December;
 - the working group on the draft Local Development Scheme on 1 December;
 - two sessions hosted by New Forest District Council on the new planning policy framework and on economy/employment;
 - the task and finish group supporting the development of the Sustainable Development Fund;
 - a training event with representatives from statutory bodies on 22 November;
 - an ANPA Induction Course in the Brecon Beacons National Park on 10 November.
3. This will be Kerry Shephard's last meeting with the Authority. His successor will be announced shortly.

Next steps

4. A workshop on dealing with issues arising from multiple representation, drawing on experience from other national parks, has been deferred until the new year.
5. Members will be actively involved in the preparation of the Corporate Plan through participation in three task and finish groups dealing with the two purposes and the duty, and in a workshop on the National Park's special qualities, which is likely to take place in early February.
6. The first meeting of the Authority Development Programme Project Assurance Team takes place on 15 December and an oral report on progress will be provided by one of the members at the Authority meeting.

Delivery of national park purposes and functions

7. The policy team has taken forward work on a number of fronts including:

Transfer of planning functions: priority vacancies have been advertised and interviews commence in the week starting 13 December. Work has continued on mapping planning business processes and a separate paper on procedures is being taken to the December Authority meeting. A report on data transfer and transition arrangements has been prepared. The project plan continues to be refined and a close watch taken on progress.

The **Sustainable Development Fund** was successfully launched to the press on 30 November; it has received good local press coverage and a number of enquiries have already been received.

Corporate planning: the policy team continued to be heavily involved in preparing for, and running, the corporate planning stakeholder event. Over 100 stakeholders attended the event which was considered to be a considerable success, providing the Authority with a clear steer on top priorities for its work in its first two years.

Local Development Scheme/Framework: work has continued on the preparation of the Local Development Scheme, which is the subject of a separate Authority meeting paper. Discussion continues with New Forest District Council on the preparation of the joint Core Strategy.

Access: the Local Access Forum meeting was held on 5 December. The Forum agreed that an Authority member should be invited to sit on the Forum from April 2006.

National Park Management Plan: the policy team contributed a presentation on the National Park Management Plan at the New Forest District Council-hosted member event on the new planning framework. Preparations for the review of the Interim Management Plan are the subject of a separate Authority Meeting paper. The baseline State of the Park Report is scheduled to be published in the new year.

Forest Friendly Farming – New Forest LEADER+ Local Action Group: Three applications, three expressions of interest and a variance to an existing project were considered at the New Forest LEADER+ Local Action Group

meeting on 29 November, 2005. The Group approved projects submitted by the New Forest Section of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society to purchase new surveying equipment and by the New Forest Transport Community Action Network to reduce the incidence of animal accidents on the Open Forest. The Group also approved a variance for an assistant to the successful Forest Friendly Farming Advisor post. Projects involving a machinery ring, a wood craft competition and commoners housing were all asked to submit applications.

Next steps

8. The main focus will continue to be on the development of the Authority's planning functions, preparation of the Local Development Scheme, work on the Authority's Corporate Plan and project development support for the Sustainable Development Fund.

Stakeholders and Communications

9. Work of the Communications team included practical preparations for the Stakeholder event, organising the press launch of the Sustainable Development Fund, completing work on updating the Authority website, completing revisions and circulating the current Frequently Asked Questions brief, preparing the November Monthly Update and a liaison meeting with New Forest District Council Communications Department.

Next steps

10. On-going work includes preparation of the Residents' Newsletter for distribution in January and an article for the Forestry Commission's Forest Focus magazine from the Chief Executive. With thanks to the Forestry Commission, detailed maps showing the boundary of the National Park on a (reduced) 1:25,000 scale have been prepared for use by members and for public events. These will be distributed shortly.

Corporate Services

Staffing/Recruitment

11. Following the interview panel on 29 November, the decision was not to appoint to the Director of Strategy and Planning post from the candidates interviewed. The candidates have been notified. Consideration is currently being given to alternative arrangements given the failure to recruit on two occasions.
12. Following the recent round of advertising, interviews will be taking place during December for 5 planning (development control) posts; and a legal advisor.
13. Martin O'Neill takes over, on a temporary basis, as Head of Communications from 13 December, joining the Authority on a full-time basis at the beginning of January. Richard Walton joined us on 7 December as the second policy advisor (recreation). We look forward to Jeff Haynes (Director of Understanding and Enjoyment) and David Stone (Head of Member Services) joining us in early January and to Stephen Trotter (Director Conservation and Enhancement) joining us towards the end of the month.

ICT

14. At 7 December, we were poised formally to procure both the Planning and GIS systems. We are shortly to evaluate the tenders submitted for a Document Management system.

Work continues on implementing the ICT strategy, including the provision of additional support from Anite to:

- design and operationalise the new website (with planning and e-government functionality) to be ready from 1 April, 2006;
- work on business process mapping for Authority as well as planning functions; assistance with data transition and reconciliation (predominantly on planning data).

Finance

15. A considerable amount of work is needed over the next three months both to prepare the Authority's budget for 2006/7 and put in place the necessary supporting documents and governance arrangements, including seeking the Authority's view on whether it wishes to set up a resources committee or deal with resources at Authority level.

Corporate Planning

16. An outline of the Authority's first Corporate Plan will be taken to the Authority meeting in January 2006, taking into account input on stakeholders' views on priorities from the 7 December stakeholder event.

Authority Development Programme progress

17. An oral report will be provided by a member of the Project Assurance Team at the Authority meeting, following the Team's first meeting on the morning of 15 December.

Accommodation

18. Progress on the move to South Efford House and on consideration of long term arrangements is being reported separately at the meeting.