

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 18 JANUARY 2007

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Report by: Martin O'Neill, Head of Communications

Summary:

This report revises and updates the Communications Strategy presented to the Authority in November 2005 and outlines the way forward for the Authority's corporate communications, moving from the launch phase to 'business as usual'.

Recommendation:

The Authority is invited to comment on and approve the strategy.

Resources:

Members' time, especially the Chairman and Deputy Chairman
Staff including the dedicated Communications' team, plus the Senior Management Team, Interpretation Officer, Education Officer, Planning Technician (graphic design), Receptionist
Some contract and consultancy support
Annual budget for staff and expenditure dedicated to communications, plus a nominal element of others' work and time

Papers:

Corporate Plan: <http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/index/aboutus/publications.htm>

Interpretation Strategy (to be published 2007)

Education Strategy (to be published 2007)

UK ANPA Communications Plan

NFNPA 43/05

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1 Current position

- 1.1 A Communications Strategy was presented to the New Forest National Park Authority in November 2005 (paper NFNPA 43/05). This report updates and revises that strategy, outlining the way forward for the Authority's corporate communications. It moves communications work from the launch phase to 'business as usual'.
- 1.2 The strategy is guided by the needs of the Authority's Corporate Plan. It is a wide-ranging, high-level document designed to guide communications' work across the Authority, whether it is delivered by the Communications team or by others.
- 1.3 This strategy follows a well-established standard format for communications planning, covering the current situation, objectives, target audiences, key messages, tactics/methods, resources, evaluation and an action plan.

2 Objectives

- 2.1 The key objectives of this Communications Strategy are derived from the Corporate Plan. The most important objectives with communications relevance are:
 - 2.1.1 **U3** Improve everyone's understanding and awareness of the New Forest National Park, in particular hard-to-reach groups.
 - 2.1.2 **A1** Build the new Authority.
 - 2.1.3 **A2** Work with and through partners to achieve the vision for the National Park and national park purposes.
 - 2.1.4 **C4** Promote local cultural traditions, skills and products.

- 2.1.5 **U4** Prepare and implement a co-ordinated programme for education about the National Park, which emphasises environmental and sustainability issues.
- 2.2 The specific communications' objectives prompted by these overarching priorities are:
 - 2.2.1 Promote the full range of the Authority's work to the public locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.
 - 2.2.2 Promote understanding of the special qualities of the New Forest National Park and opportunities for recreation to the public.
 - 2.2.3 Raise awareness of the National Park's purposes.

3 Target audiences

- 3.1 There are three main external audiences and two main internal audiences for this Communications Strategy.
 - 3.1.1 The primary external audience is composed of people who live or work in the New Forest National Park together with visitors and potential visitors.
 - 3.1.2 The secondary audience is composed of those who can help to deliver national park purposes or influence others such as the Forestry Commission, the Verderers, local authorities, the National Trust, the tourism industry, Natural England, MPs and the media.
 - 3.1.3 The tertiary audience is composed of specialist groups which have a specific interest in the New Forest and the National Park's work such as the New Forest Consultative Panel, the New Forest Access Forum, the New Forest Association and the Commoners' Defence Association.
 - 3.1.4 The two main internal audiences for this strategy are National Park Authority members and staff.
- 3.2 Successful communications is as much about the receiver of the message as it is about the sender; for each communications activity it is important that the audience is clearly identified and accurately targeted.
- 3.3 This is especially so because limited resources will mean that it is not possible to target all audiences at once with any degree of effectiveness. Some major communications activities may require a plan and audience segmentation of their own.

4 Key messages

- 4.1 Key messages are an important tool for the Authority's communications. Once defined, they guide the work of the Communications' team through press, website, publications, talks and events and underpin other external communications such as interpretation and education.
- 4.2 The use and understanding of key messages can be measured, offering a helpful indicator of the success of communications activity. The Authority's key messages will be a mixture of constant and changing lines.
- 4.3 In the Authority's first 18 months, most of its key messages were about the organisation: its existence, its purposes, its powers, its aims and approach and, especially, its planning role. As the Authority leaves its launch phase and conducts business as usual, the key messages are evolving.
- 4.4 More work needs to be done to define the key messages precisely and to strike the appropriate balance between core messages and those that may be temporary or changing according to the aims of the Corporate Plan or specific campaigns. For this strategy the key messages are:
 - 4.4.1 The two purposes of the National Park and the social and economic duty.
 - 4.4.2 The major challenges faced by England's newest national park: the pressures for economic, transport and housing development from the south-east and the south-west; the future of commoning; sustainability and climate change; conservation and recreation.
 - 4.4.3 Partnership as a key way of working for the New Forest National Park Authority.
 - 4.4.4 The Authority as a listening ear and national voice for the New Forest National Park.
 - 4.4.5 How the New Forest National Park Authority is starting to make a difference through actions inspired by the Corporate Plan: grants, partnership working, and so on.
- 4.5 Key messages will be reviewed annually.

5 Tactics/methods

- 5.1 The tactics for delivery of communications activity will mirror those of the Authority as a whole outlined in the Corporate Plan:

communications work will be conducted in partnership where it is practical and cost-effective to do so.

5.2 Methods for external communications include:

- the website
- news releases
- responses to press enquiries
- publications
- the talks service
- shows and events
- awareness research
- campaigns
- film
- boundary markers and signing
- awareness panels
- learning materials and contacts with education groups.

5.3 Methods for internal communications include:

- the intranet
- staff induction and training
- staff meetings
- internal newsletters
- the press cuttings service
- briefings
- the communications forward planner
- workshops.

6 Resources

6.1 All members, and especially the Chairman and Deputy Chairman, have an important role in the Communications Strategy through their attendance at events, talks and as representatives on outside bodies.

6.2 A number of staff in the Authority have a key role in communications, notably the Senior Management Team, the Interpretation Officer, the Education Officer, the Planning Technician (graphic design) and the Receptionist.

6.3 The Communications team consists of 3.5 permanent staff – the Head of Communications, Communications Officer, Information Officer and part-time Administrative Assistant. A part-time Web Content Developer has been employed on a temporary contract. (The total staff budget for 2006-7 is £141,969 including external support.)

6.4 The Communications team has a non-staff budget of £126,000 for 2006-7 of which the lion's share is committed to design, print and distribution of essential corporate printed publications such as *Park Life*, the *Pocket Guide*, National Parks' Week leaflets, the Corporate Plan and providing the Authority's presence at the New Forest Show. Some £52,000 of the budget was allocated as 'start-up' costs involved

in launching the National Park. The regular annual expenditure budget is expected to be in the region of £100,000.

7 Evaluation

- 7.1 Communications activity outlined in this strategy will be subject to a series of quantitative and qualitative performance indicators to measure success and to help shape future initiatives. Baseline figures will be established for 2006-7 to enable targets to be set for 2007-8.
- 7.2 'Contacts' will be counted through the number contacting the Authority in person, by telephone, by letter and by e-mail using the enquiries@newforestnpa.gov.uk address, the number attending talks, workshops and consultation meetings and the number visiting the New Forest Show stand.
- 7.3 Awareness of the National Park and its purposes will be tracked through an opinion poll survey conducted jointly with other national parks in spring 2007.
- 7.4 For the website, figures will be collected for the number of unique visits, the number of page-views, the time per visit and the most-visited pages.
- 7.5 In media we will record the number of news releases issued, enquiries answered, cuttings mentioning the National Park and the number and per centage of cuttings including key messages.

8 Action plan

- 8.1 As a high-level overview, this strategy does not describe every action that will be taken to deliver communications for the National Park and the Authority. Highlighted below are some of the key communications actions for 2007-8:

Media

- 8.2 Write and issue regular news releases with the aim of keeping people informed, through the media, of important initiatives and developments (c. one release a week).
- 8.3 Provide prompt, informative and insightful comment in response to enquiries from the media when required.
- 8.4 Monitor media coverage of the National Park and the Authority, in particular noting the extent to which key messages are included.
- 8.5 Provide support and training as required for members and officers in their dealings with the media.

Corporate identity

- 8.6 Revise and refine the National Park's key messages annually and encourage their use.
- 8.7 Devise and publish the National Park's corporate identity guidance by the end of March 2007.
- 8.8 Encourage use of the house style for all the Authority's written work on an on-going basis.
- 8.9 Working with the Planning Technician (graphic design), support and advise colleagues who need to commission design and print on behalf of the Authority.
- 8.10 Establish the New Forest National Park photographic library during 2007.

Publications and publicity

- 8.11 Write and produce a range of publications designed to communicate the National Park's purposes, the work of the Authority and key messages to the main audiences – notably the biannual *Park Life* newsletter, the regular *Update* and the annual *Pocket Guide*.
- 8.12 Contribute to a range of partnership publications including the annual *Forest Focus* newspaper with the Forestry Commission and *New Forest Today*, published three times a year, with New Forest District Council, the Forestry Commission and others.
- 8.13 Commission a short introductory film about the National Park and the Authority's work in 2007 for use in talks to community groups, on the website and elsewhere.

Website

- 8.14 Edit the National Park website, working with all Directorates to develop content, interactive and e-government elements during 2007 according to priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan.
- 8.15 Determine early in 2007 the optimum level of content development support required by the Authority to maintain and improve the website.

Marketing

- 8.16 Provide marketing advice and support for the Authority and for a range of associated initiatives including New Forest produce and the tour bus.

- 8.17 Contribute to or run campaigns on specific subjects – for example to tackle litter in conjunction with the Forestry Commission and New Forest District Council.
- 8.18 Investigate in 2007 the options for production and sale of National Park merchandise.

Special events

- 8.19 Organise or support the National Park Authority's attendance at events, most notably the New Forest Show in July 2007, National Parks' Week in August 2007 and member attendance at village and town events.
- 8.20 Offer a number of interpretive events (walks and talks).
- 8.21 Administer the Authority's response to requests for talks on a weekly basis.
- 8.22 Maintain a 'standard' presentation on the New Forest National Park and the work of the Authority.

Information/awareness

- 8.22 Administer the Authority's e-mail enquiries service, responding to queries where possible or logging them and forwarding them for a response as necessary.
- 8.23 Commission research to measure awareness of the National Park and its purposes in conjunction with other national parks in spring 2007.
- 8.24 Support the development of strategies for interpretation and education being undertaken by the Understanding and Enjoyment Directorate.
- 8.25 Establish boundary markers to raise awareness of the National Park and contribute display panels to visitor centres, attractions, education centres and other sites.
- 8.26 Support innovative work to engage 'stakeholders' and hard-to-reach groups in National Park activity, for example in consultations and via the Sustainable Development Fund.
- 8.27 Maintain a list of 'frequently-asked questions'.

Internal communications

- 8.27 Review and develop internal communications, including use of induction, staff meetings, newsletters and the intranet.

9 Recommendation

The Authority is invited to comment on and approve the strategy.