

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 26 MARCH 2008

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 28 February 2008 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in February.

Recommendation:

To note the report.

Paper:

NFNPA 240/08: Cover paper

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- 1 This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 28 February 2008 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in February.

Members

- 2 Some members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events:

- New Forest Access Forum meeting, 3 March
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 4 March
- Core Strategy joint member advisory group meeting, 6 March
- Consultative Panel meeting, 6 March
- Country Landowners – local estate visit to Beaulieu, 10 March
- Meeting of the Bournemouth International Airport Consultative Committee, 13 March
- Members' workshop on the emerging Corporate Plan, 13 March
- Management Plan/Core Strategy Project Assurance Group, 14 March
- 'New Forest, New Chapter' concluding workshop, 17 March
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 18 March, followed by informal session with Inspector Manager for the South East on planning appeals.
- Meeting with Leader, Christchurch Borough Council, 19 March
- Ninth Centenary Trust Agreement: Executive Management Group, 25 March

- 3 Forthcoming activities include:

- Members' informal briefing and discussion on proposed mineral allocation sites following the Authority meeting on 26 March
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association meeting, 28 March
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Improvement Board meeting, 1 April

- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 11 April
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 15 April
- Core Strategy joint member advisory group meeting, 17 April
- Tour for members of the Planning Development Control Committee, 28 April
- Consultative Panel meeting, 1 May
- Standards Committee meeting, 6 May
- Southern Parks' Conference, 7 and 8 May
- Lymington harbour tour, 8 May
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 20 May

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

Conservation, Recreation and Sustainable Development

4 Partnership working

Funding

- Following a meeting with the Heritage Lottery Fund to discuss New Forest projects and funding priorities, the Fund has recommended submitting the Maritime Archaeology project to their "Our Heritage" funding programme for the end of March deadline. Work has begun on pulling together the application form, budgets, supporting documents, match-funding agreements and letters of support required. The proposed project aims comprehensively to survey the New Forest inter-tidal and marine zones, bringing together professional archaeologists and volunteers to carry out the work. This will be accompanied by a programme of education and outreach initiatives including educational workshops, events and interpretation.
- Staff have had discussions with the South East England Development Agency about providing funding for the improvements to Beaulieu Road Sales Yard. Initial feedback is positive and SEEDA officers visited the site on 13 March to discuss the proposals, including a number of issues relating to costs and designs.
- Staff have provided funding advice to a number of organisations including Avon Tyrrell, St Barbe Museum, New Forest Association and New Forest Community Media.

5 Corporate Plan

Landscape (C2)

- Staff attended a Natural England Landscape Policy workshop in Reading, which provided an important opportunity to influence and shape Natural England's emerging policy on landscape issues.
- Staff returned Historic Landscape Character information for two Farm Environment Plans; Norleywood Farm and Bisterne Estate and made contributions to the consultation on the recently introduced 1APP planning application.

Nature Conservation (C3)

- Staff facilitated and attended the Local Authority Biodiversity Forum where issues relating to the biodiversity checklist were resolved. This is intended to support the local requirements for the 1APP planning application process that will start in April. The checklist will help applicants to anticipate the Authority's information requirements for ecological survey to assist our application validation.
- Support for the Management Plan and Core Strategy has also continued with meetings and screening work for the Habitats Regulations Assessment of the documents. An initial screening of approximately 90 policies that have been provided from the Management Plan in conjunction with staff from Plan Policy has been undertaken. The results will inform development of the policies. Staff have also contributed to work on the Sustainability Appraisal of the plans.
- Staff facilitated a meeting with New Forest District Council, Natural England and RSPB to address representations to the Council's Preferred Options consultation relating to the Habitats Regulations Assessment the Authority produced on the Council's behalf.

Conservation of cultural heritage (C6)

- Meetings were held with the County Archaeologist and the Winchester City Archaeological Curator to develop a common approach across Hampshire's Planning Authorities to the 1APP planning process for archaeological issues. A meeting of the Planning and Legislation Committee of the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers was attended where the Hampshire 1APP model for archaeology was outlined.
- The report on the Lymington Harbour Archaeological walkover survey has been received.

- A meeting of the Hampshire Portable Antiquities Scheme was attended in Winchester. The potential for organising a finds identification day in conjunction with the New Forest Centre was considered.
- A lecture on the archaeology of the National Park was given to the Wellow History Group. Two training sessions on building recording and history were provided to National Trust volunteers at Mottisfont Abbey.

Recreation (U1)

- Staff are in the process of trialling Global Positioning System (GPS) devices prior to developing a project that will provide downloadable GPS routes for the Authority website. These routes will allow people to explore more of the forest in a managed way with the aid of their GPS as a replacement to the traditional map and compass. The project is due to be piloted in the North of the forest in late spring and then further developed if successful.

Traffic and transport (U2)

- Staff organised and chaired a meeting of the New Forest Tour Steering Group. The New Forest Tour is in its final year under the current funding arrangements and it is vital that the service performs strongly during the summer 2008 season. The key output of the meeting was that stakeholders approved the 2008 Marketing Plan and started making arrangements to implement some 35 marketing actions. For more information on the New Forest Tour visit www.thenewforesttour.info

Access (U6)

- The Authority attended the launch event of Hampshire County Council's newly published Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way.

Sustainable Development (SE 1)

- Three Green Business workshops were held for New Forest businesses, in partnership with New Forest Business Partnership, Green Leaf Tourism Scheme and New Forest Marque. The workshops addressed a range of sustainability issues including energy, waste and packaging and were attended by 35 different businesses.
- A talk was given on 'Eco Projects' taking place in the New Forest, as part of the New Forest Carbon Footprint Project in Brockenhurst.

- A meeting was held with Hampshire Wildlife Trust to develop ideas for a joint funded farm advisory post.
- A site visit was made with a commoners dwelling scheme applicant to discuss a proposed new dwelling.
- Staff attended a market users group meeting to discuss future plans including the setting up of a market co-operative.

Information and Visitor Services

6 Corporate Plan

- 200,000 more animal accident hotline cards have been printed, together with 500 desktop dispensers. These are being distributed to a wide range of outlets in and around the National Park. **(A1, U3)**
- The next 10 education factsheets have been printed and are available on the website (in the student area), bringing the total to 14: a very significant resource for schools and colleges, but also useful in a wide range of other situations. **(U4)**
- An abridged version of the National Park *Pocket Guide* is being prepared for inclusion in hotel room-folders. **(A1, U3)**
- The Authority has placed orders for the remaining timber boundary markers (for 27 roadside locations and one remaining long-distance footpath); zinc way-marker discs (for some 50 minor footpath locations) and negotiations for trunk road boundary signs (for the A36, A31 and M27) are well-advanced. **(U3)**
- Fifteen events for 2008 have been organised and are available to view on the website 'What's On' pages. **(U3)**
- The Authority has appointed Hayley Sharpe Design to help us work up designs for the proposed mobile information unit. Plans to introduce up to three pilot 'Local Information Points' in forest villages are also progressing with the aim of both these initiatives being operational this summer. (See separate agenda item) **(U3)**
- Work continued on the 'Your Shout' project - engaging with young people for input into the Management Plan and to perform a short scene-setting theatre piece at the Management Plan concluding event on 17 March. A short film is also being made of the project. **(U4)**
- Work progressed towards the production of a leaflet, poster and postcard specifically to promote the Park's special qualities. **(A1, U3)**

- An additional set of four postcards will both highlight interesting facts about the National Park, and raise awareness of litter, wildfires, animal accidents and disturbance to ground-nesting birds. **(U3)**
- Staff started preparation of the next *Park Life* newsletter. **(A1, U3)**
- Work was commissioned to test the usability of the National Park's website two years on and to inform future developments. **(A1)**

7 Partnership working

- The 2008 *Forest Focus* visitor/resident newspaper, produced jointly with the Forestry Commission, was published at the end of February and distribution started in early March. **(A1, C2, U3)**
- The spring edition of *New Forest Today*, produced jointly with New Forest District Council and others, was prepared. **(A1, U3)**
- The Authority approved the proposed design of a new animal accident warning sign to be recommended to the Highway Authority as a replacement for the very large shield-shaped signs located at the start of high-risk routes. Subject to agreement with Hampshire County Council, they will be trialed on the B3054 Lymington to Dibden Purlieu road, as part of the wider sign rationalisation programme on this pilot route. **(U3)**
- Work continued on detailed design and planning work with the New Forest Centre for re-branding the exterior and updating displays inside as part of the partnership arrangements between the Ninth Centenary Trust and the National Park Authority. **(U3)**
- The joint RSPB, Forestry Commission, Carnx Films and National Park 'Aren't Birds Brilliant! in the New Forest' project is set to be repeated this spring: further funding has been found to expand and broaden the audience and a project assistant has been recruited. **(U3)**
- Work progressed on a New Forest Outdoor Science Project, part-funded by the British Ecological Society. Up to six local secondary schools and one local Pupil Referral Unit are expected to take part this summer. **(U4)**
- The spring 2008 Forest Force litter pick included public events, local community volunteer effort and a joint staff litter pick with New Forest District Council and the Forestry Commission. **(U3)**

8 Other activities

- Regular work was carried out answering media queries, writing news releases, producing *The Update*, responding to talks requests and answering queries via the enquiries e-mail address. (A1, U3)

Planning Policy

9 Corporate Plan

Corporate Plan Objective A3: Management Plan

- The team continues to develop the emerging Management Plan (and integrate this with work on the Local Development Framework Core Strategy, see below) in preparation for publication of a Draft for consultation in the summer. This included writing up and circulating the results of previous workshops, revising and refining the earlier outline policies, and compiling sets of documents and display materials for further internal and external consideration.
- A meeting of the Management Plan and Core Strategy Project Board was held to discuss progress and direction of these plans.
- The overall work plan and timetable was presented to the Project Assurance Team, comprised of three Authority Members (one unable to attend on this occasion), for their consideration and advice.
- The last of the 'New Forest, New Chapter' consultative workshops were held on 17 March, where local stakeholders reviewed outcomes from the preceding workshops; indicated preferences and priorities for actions; and considered potential monitoring indicators,.

Corporate Plan Objective A4: Spatial Planning Policies

- The team continued to develop the emerging Local Development Framework Core Strategy, and to merge this into a single document with the Management Plan (see above). This has included drafting of topic papers to provide the national and regional policy background and local evidence for series of key topic areas, such as housing, employment, etc., and exploring ways to integrate Management Plan and Core Strategy text and procedures.
- Work continued to foster understanding and involvement with neighbouring authorities and partner organisations, including:

- A workshop on 26 February, with ward councillors from Hampshire County, New Forest District, Test Valley Borough, Salisbury District and Christchurch Borough Councils feeding into the development of the National Park Management Plan.
- The latest meeting of the Joint Member Advisory Group (made up of members from the National Park Authority and New Forest District Council) on 11 February which considered the affordable housing options and potential economy policy for the National Park.

10 Other work

The team continues to be involved in a range of work to coordinate with and influence partner and neighbour organisations. The team represented the Authority at:

- The latest meeting with the Registered Social Landlords and the housing team at New Forest District Council. The meeting included an update on the new 1APP system and a summary of the responses received to the draft New Forest District Council affordable housing policies as set out in their Core Strategy Preferred Options document.
- The South East Protected Landscapes meeting on 1 February, to share news and best practice with the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the Region.
- The meeting of the Dorset and South Wiltshire Planning and Transportation Committee in Poole on 7 February where the implications of the recently published Inspector Panel's Report into the draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy were discussed.
- The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Development Plan Officers' Group meeting in Eastleigh. Discussions included the progress authorities had made on their Local Development Frameworks and lessons to be learned from the consultation that had taken place so far.
- A 'Joining Up the Processes' meeting with New Forest District Council and the New Forest Local Strategic Partnership to guide the development of the Community Strategy for New Forest District and the respective core strategies for the National Park and New Forest District.
- A meeting held by Hampshire County Council in Winchester to discuss the requirements for local authorities to produce Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments (SHLAAs) to facilitate future development.

- Joint National Park Authority – New Forest District Council meetings on the Sustainability Appraisal/Appropriate Assessment of the emerging policies for the National Park and the District surrounding the National Park continued.
- A productive meeting was with NFDC planning staff to develop a common approach to the treatment of measures to mitigate the impacts of development on European designated sites, potentially including evidence base, Core Strategy approach, 'community infrastructure levies', coordination with South Hampshire (PUSH) and Dorset initiatives, and a potential joint fund and delivery oversight group with representation of other partners.

11 Development Control

During February the Development Control unit carried out the following work:

Planning applications: received 101. Applications were registered within three working days following receipt.

Planning decisions: 86 issued, of which 67 were approved (78%) and 17 were refused (26%). One application was part approved/refused. Two applications were withdrawn. Ten (12%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 19 February.

77% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 71% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

Live planning applications: 359 at 29 February, compared with 335 at 31 January.

Appeals: six new appeals received this month. Of the four appeal decisions in February, one was allowed, and one dismissed. Two appeals were withdrawn.

Enforcement: 59 new enforcement cases were registered in January and 29 cases were closed. There were 292 outstanding enforcement cases at the end of the month. Three enforcement notices were served during February.

12 Environmental Design

- The team was consulted by Development Control on 75 applications during February, 44 of which were returned within the 14 day target date. Thirty are still live. **(Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7)**

- Twenty seven tree work applications were registered during February and 30 determined, 100% of which within the eight week target date. Two Tree Preservation Orders were made.
- The review of conservation areas in the National Park as set out in **Corporate Plan Objective C7** is progressing well. Public consultation took place on the proposed Western Escarpment conservation area. This large area falls mainly within the parishes of Hale, Woodgreen, Godshill, Hyde, and parts of Ellingham Harbridge and Ibsley and Ringwood. The results of this and the proposed Forest North East conservation area consultation have been assessed and proposals are included in a separate report to this meeting.
- Building Preservation Notices were served in respect of two attached cottages in Hyde. They are typical forest encroachment dwellings, built of clay cob with thatched roofs. The occupant of one of the dwellings has recently passed away leaving both properties vacant and vulnerable. The buildings are now treated as if they were listed buildings for a period of six months whilst the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in consultation with English Heritage make a decision whether or not formally to list them.

13 Member Services

- The Member Services section has been involved in facilitating preparations for Authority and committee meetings, providing committee and member support and following up on actions arising from meetings, as well as monitoring complaints and Freedom of Information requests received by the Authority. Member Services also provides support to meetings of the New Forest Consultative Panel and facilitated a meeting of the Panel on 6 March 2008, at which the Chairman of the Panel, Tim Greenwood, was re-appointed. Following a request from a Panel member organisation, the section has printed extra copies of the Consultative Panel leaflet.
- In accordance with the new training programme for members, Member Services organised a members' estate visit to Beaulieu on 10 March. In addition, the section has begun arrangements for a tour of the Northern part of the Forest for the members of the Planning Development Control Committee to take place on 28 April, and is finalising arrangements for the Southern Parks' Conference on 7 and 8 May 2008. The section has also surveyed members and the public on how the service can be improved. The section has begun work preparing for the annual appointment of members to represent the Authority on external organisations and reviewed the Authority's Standing Orders.

Corporate Services

14 Human Resources

- As of 29 February 2008 there are 71 members of staff or 66.34 full time equivalents, of whom 12 are part-time, 12 are on a fixed-term contracts and 1 post is externally funded.
- There are no vacant posts.
- A meeting with Unison took place in early March, the HR team continue to encourage and support Unison in engaging with staff.
- Lifestyle medicals will be completed by April for all staff that chose to take up the offer.
- A range of computer skills training, identified through staff self assessment questionnaires, has been organised and delivered in February and will continue into March.

15 ICT

- The pilot of the Authority's time recoding system is proceeding well with very positive feedback from both staff and managers on the ease of use and practicality.
- Liaison with the National Parks' website portal manager has secured further assistance in setting up the content management system linked to the new web site design.
- The Authority is exploring the potential for the use of mobile GPS units that could be used for recording rights of ways, the location of trees that are subject to tree preservation orders and recommended walking routes that can then be accessed via the Authority's website.

16 Finance and performance

- The preparation of the Authority's budget for 2008/09 is complete and is a separate agenda item.

Recommendation

To note the report.