

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 28 JUNE 2007

DRAFT SIGNAGE STRATEGY FOR THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK

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1 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this Strategy is to establish a framework which will guide proposals and action to reduce signage clutter, encourage better presentation of necessary existing signs, and improve the design of any new signs within the National Park. It concentrates on the countryside outside settlements, and primarily on highway signs, and does not cover planning issues relating, for example, to signs subject to control through advertisement regulations.
- 1.2 The New Forest National Park Authority has a strategic role in ensuring that signage within the National Park reflects national park purposes by:
- guiding and influencing signage to ensure that the special qualities of the National Park are conserved and enhanced – particularly as regards visual impact;
 - guiding, influencing and in some cases delivering signage which enables people to enjoy and understand the National Park (for example installing boundary markers).

2 Background

- 2.1 Signs on the highway are essential or desirable in some locations to give information and direction to the road user in the interests of road safety and ease of navigation. Highway signs are placed under statutory powers granted by the Department for Transport to the Highway Authority. Regulations guide sign design and positioning in four main categories:
- Regulatory Signs - signs with red circles;
 - Warning Signs - mostly triangular;
 - Direction Signs - mostly rectangular;
 - Information Signs - mostly rectangular.

- 2.2 The New Forest has special authorisation for the 40mph zone and the way it is signed. This includes the design of the 40 zone signs located at entry points and the use of 40 roundels painted on the roads instead of repeater signs on posts.
- 2.3 Non-highway related signs may be placed on the highway under licence by the local authority (New Forest District Council, Salisbury District Council and Test Valley Borough Council) but these require the consent of the Highway Authority (Hampshire County Council and Wiltshire County Council).
- 2.4 Key types of non-highway related signs in the National Park covered by this strategy include information about land ownership, brown tourism signs, animal warning signs and forest car park information points.
- 2.5 The need for a rationalisation strategy for signs across the New Forest National Park has arisen for a variety of reasons:
 - i) The number of signs has increased over recent decades. While new signs have been added, some old or redundant ones have not been removed. In consequence, many current signs appear to be poorly designed, located or maintained. There is now an opportunity to promote the highest standards of signage generally, in order to strengthen the sense of place and there is widespread acknowledgement that a rationalisation initiative is needed. The Authority's Corporate Plan 2007-2008 (U3) includes the following action:
 - Reduce the impact of signs through developing and implementing a plan for removal, rationalisation and replacement, incorporating common design elements, wherever possible, working in partnership with the highway authorities.
 - ii) Animal road accidents are a significant and emotive local issue for the New Forest and a desire to reduce their frequency through the use of signs has resulted in a proliferation of conspicuous non-statutory warning signs carrying a range of messages.
 - iii) The pressure to follow national awareness campaigns (such as 'Don't Drink and Drive') and attempts to reduce car-related crime have resulted in signage which is not specific to the New Forest and does not respect the special qualities of the National Park landscape.
 - iv) Some elements of the current signs are clearly no longer appropriate (such as the New Forest Committee logos at entrances to the 40mph zone).

- v) The boundary of the National Park needs to be indicated through the use of appropriate markers. These are intended to enhance the 'sense of place' and to encourage positive attitudes towards the area and respect for its special qualities.
- vi) There is a potential opportunity to create a common design thread among some signs within the National Park. These include non-statutory signs (where the design is not strictly regulated) and some specific elements of statutory signs (primarily their supporting posts and coloured borders of composite signs).

3 Responsibilities

- 3.1 The Highways Agency is responsible for signs on the M27, A31 and A36.
- 3.2 Hampshire and Wiltshire County Councils, as Highway Authorities, are responsible for signs on all other public highways.
- 3.3 New Forest District Council has a traffic management agency agreement with Hampshire County Council. This allows them to perform certain traffic management functions on behalf of the County Council. Such functions could include tourist signing, traffic calming and waiting restrictions, together with associated signage, but would exclude maintenance of signs.
- 3.4 New Forest District Council is responsible for town and village name signs and street signs on public highways maintained by Hampshire County Council. These fall outside this strategy.
- 3.5 Local Authorities are obliged to try to reduce the number of killed and seriously injured people and road signage has a role to play.
- 3.6 As the largest landowner in the area and the provider of most car parks, the Forestry Commission is responsible for many signs indicating its land ownership and countryside recreation facilities.
- 3.7 The Verderers are influential in determining whether or not new non-statutory signs are appropriate on Crown Land, beyond the limit of the public highway.
- 3.8 Various groups exist whose activities can have an impact on signs in the Forest. Key groups include:
 - the New Forest Road Safety Council which coordinates some safety education initiatives across the District;
 - the New Forest Safer Roads Group which coordinates the use of Speed Indicator Devices (known as SIDs);
 - an Animal Accident Reduction Group which has recently started to meet;

- the Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group set up by the National Park Authority.

4 The National Park context

4.1 One of the reasons for designation as a National Park is the recognition of its special landscape quality, and to ensure it is conserved, enhanced, understood and enjoyed. Key aspects of National Park status which should influence signage include:

- the natural appearance of the landscape and vegetation;
- the lack of hard features such as rocks;
- the open views in the grazed areas;
- the presence of grazing stock which might be attracted to or endangered by signs.

5 Underlying principles for signs in the New Forest National Park

5.1 The Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group has adopted the following principles which should apply to any policy or proposals for signage in the New Forest National Park. They were agreed by the Authority on 20 July 2006.

- i) New signage should only be installed where there is a clearly demonstrated purpose and need consistent with National Park purposes.
- ii) Locations should be selected which offer maximum opportunities for delivering messages with greatest impact.
- iii) Locations should reflect the full range of potential audiences (not just car users).
- iv) There should be fewer rather than more signs in the National Park:
 - Unnecessary, out of date, or misleading signs should be removed.
 - Opportunities to rationalise clusters of signs should be considered.
- v) Rationalisation may result in opportunities to reinforce awareness of the National Park at key internal locations.
- vi) Design principles, where appropriate, should include:
 - clarity, simplicity and achievement of purpose;
 - attractiveness and in keeping with the New Forest environment;
 - clear links or connections with the New Forest in design, materials or manufacture;
 - sustainability and durability;

- progress towards a recognisable common thread throughout the National Park signage.

vii) Road safety should remain a paramount consideration and not be compromised by either design or location.

5.2 Practical implementation of proposals for signage should also consider the following:

- i) Other methods of conveying the message should be considered either as an alternative, or as well as signage.
- ii) For some issues, especially seasonal messages, temporary signs may be more effective and would be preferred to permanent signs.
- iii) The effectiveness, and continued need for specific signs, should be subject to planned, periodic review.

6 Specific projects involving signage

6.1 Proposals or programmes for specific areas of work should be informed by this signage strategy including:

- the annual programme of planned highway maintenance carried out by the Highway Authorities;
- New Forest aspects of the countywide signage decluttering initiative being instigated by Hampshire County Council;
- the decluttering programme instigated by the New Forest National Park Authority;
- new signage schemes, for example for weight restriction zones and new cycle routes;
- the design, installation and maintenance of boundary markers for the National Park, together with any internal reminders;
- ongoing attempts to reduce the number of animal accidents.

7 Use of the strategy

7.1 This strategy should be adopted by the key organisations with responsibilities for signage in the National Park (Hampshire County Council, Wiltshire County Council, New Forest District Council, Salisbury District Council, Test Valley Borough Council, Forestry Commission and New Forest National Park Authority). Where appropriate it should also be made available to other landowners to guide any signage they may wish to install.

7.2 It is particularly important that the underlying principles listed in section 5 are agreed and incorporated into highway authority maintenance plans and new integrated traffic management schemes.