

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**AUTHORITY MEETING – 6 DECEMBER 2007**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

**Report by:** Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

**Summary:**

This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 18 October 2007 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in October.

**Recommendation:**

**To note the report.**

**Resources:**

Routine

**Paper:**

**NFNPA 218/07:** Cover paper

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- 1 This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 18 October 2007 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in October. This has been an extremely busy period on all fronts but particularly on some major planning issues, the autumn consultation on the Management Plan and Core Strategy, and on Conservation areas, and hosting a range of visits including the Minister for National Parks and for the South East, Jonathan Shaw MP, staff from the Council of National Parks and the National Parks' Sustainable Development Officers' Group.

**Members**

- 2 Some members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events:
  - Standards Committee meeting, following the Authority meeting on 18 October
  - Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 6 November
  - 'New Forest, New Chapter' – Recreation Management Strategy workshop, 7 November
  - Visit from Jonathan Shaw MP, Minister for Marine, Landscape and Rural Affairs and Minister for the South East, 12 November
  - 'New Forest, New Chapter' – Conservation and Enhancement Topic Group, 13 November
  - 'New Forest, New Chapter' – Living and Working Topic Group, 14 November
  - New Forest Consultative Panel meeting, 15 November
  - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 20 November
  - Equine Pasture Management seminar and training event, 20 November
  - Council for National Parks meeting, 20 November
  - New Forest Biodiversity Action Plan workshop, 22 November
  - 'New Forest, New Chapter' – Understanding and Enjoyment Topic Group, 27 November
  - Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group, 28 November

- Local Development Framework Core Strategy Joint Member Advisory Group, 29 November
- Biodiversity, heathland and climate change/ sea level rise briefing session, 30 November
- New Forest Access Forum meeting, 3 December.

3 Forthcoming activities include:

- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 10 December
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 18 December
- Informal staff and member get together, 18 December
- Development Control policy review session, 18 December
- Consultative Panel meeting, 3 January
- 'New Forest, New Chapter' – Conservation and Enhancement Topic Group, 8 January
- 'New Forest, New Chapter' – Living and Working Topic Group, 9 January
- 'New Forest, New Chapter' – Understanding and Enjoyment Topic Group, 10 January
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 15 January
- Natural England briefing session, 15 January.

## **DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS**

### **Conservation, Recreation and Sustainable Development**

#### **4 Partnership working**

##### **Funding**

##### **LEADER**

- Three LEADER workshops have now been held to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to identify the type of projects they would like the new LEADER programme to support. The workshops focused on local produce, sustainable communities and forestry and woodland. A meeting of the Local Action Group was held to discuss who might be included in the Local Action Group for the new programme (the Local Action Group is the appraisal panel for the LEADER programme).
- A skills analysis of the existing Local Action Group has been carried out to assess where the skills gaps would be for the new LEADER programme and recruitment for Local Action Group members has started to fill the gaps. Geodata, based at Southampton University, have been employed to help put together

the evidence base to support the submission of the LEADER bid in January 2008.

### **New Forest: Life in Common**

- The Life in Common Project Board will meet early in December to discuss and assess the lists of project proposals (of varying levels of detail) which have now been drafted into six programmes. These are provisionally:
  - A. Landscape, Archaeology and Built Environment (restoration / conservation work)
  - B. Commoning - specific projects
  - C. Access (physical)
  - D. Learning and discovery
  - E. Celebration
  - F. Training
- The pressure is now on to put estimated costs to each project and to identify match-funding opportunities. The aim is to provide 50% match funding across the Life in Common scheme overall.
- The range of supporting documents that need to be submitted with the Bid are at varying stages of development, with the Audience Development Plan nearing completion.

## **5 Corporate Plan**

### **Landscape (C2)**

- The Authority was represented at the Annual Meeting of the Hampshire Gardens Trust at Mottisfont Abbey and the first meeting of the Salisbury District Council Landscape Character Assessment Steering Group, held in Salisbury.
- Further progress was made on the New Forest Landscape Strategy and staff provided input and comments on the Forestry Commission's Forest Design Plans.
- Discussions have taken place between Authority staff, the Forestry Commission and Hampshire County Council Highways over the proposed repair to road edges on Rhinefield Ornamental Drive. Because of the sensitivity of the location, it has been agreed that the Highways Authority would carry out trials elsewhere in the Forest to test different materials and the Authority would be invited to see the trial results before any final decision is taken.

### **Nature conservation (C3)**

- A workshop for key stakeholders was held on 22 November to discuss the development of the New Forest Biodiversity Action Plan. A liaison meeting was held with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and South West Natural England to agree coverage of the Biodiversity Action Plans and scope future projects and partnership working on biodiversity projects. Additional external partnership funding has been secured and work commissioned to undertake research on the possible effects of new development sites through a potential increase in recreational visits on European designated sites within the New Forest area.

### **Cultural traditions (C4)**

- The steering group for the Living Register project met to discuss progress. A number of volunteers have been trained to collect oral histories and a further training opportunity is planned. Work to collect information on local language is progressing, with links to local schools and parish councils.

### **Conservation of cultural heritage (C6)**

- A new project has been implemented involving the archaeology and analytical understanding of the Salterns Buildings at Creek Cottage, Lymington. This information will assist discussion on their future use as well as providing greater knowledge of the last remaining buildings of this type associated with the post-medieval British coastal salt industry.
- The preparation of the draft project design for the proposed archaeological *Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment* is in the final stages, awaiting comments from potential funding agencies. The project design has reached the first formal stage of the English Heritage process. A meeting of potential stakeholders will be held in January to progress the project.

### **Recreation (U1)**

- A successful Recreation Management Strategy workshop was held on 7 November with around 85 stakeholders contributing their views on recreation management in some detail. This will feed directly into the preparation of the Strategy in the coming months. Further work continues to prepare the evidence base to assess the impacts of recreation on the National Park.

### **Traffic and transport (U2)**

- Discussions have taken place with New Forest District Council to progress a signing schedule for National Cycle Network route 2 between Hythe and Brockenhurst.

- Other meetings included:
  - Solent Blue Line and other New Forest Tour funding partners to review the 2007 season and look at options for 2008 and beyond, which is a separate agenda item
  - New Forest Hampshire Action Team to explore opportunities for closer joint working
  - English National Park Authorities' Association Sustainable Tourism Group
  - Community Rail Partnership for Brockenhurst to Lymington line.
- The Authority's written response was submitted to the Hampshire County Council Scrutiny Review of the case for a Lyndhurst Bypass.

#### **Access (U6)**

- Meetings have been held with Hampshire County Council and the Forestry Commission to identify ways that the Authority can work with those organisations to make practical improvements to access provision. Ideas under discussion include:
  - replacement of awkward structures with easy to use gates at Keyhaven, on the Solent Way at Walhampton, on the 'Lepe Loop' and as a progressive improvement programme on access routes;
  - construction of new path at Lepe County Park;
  - improvements to paths at Keyhaven;
  - improvements to the surface of a short section of path, which is part of a route linking Everton to the Open Forest;
  - application of non-slip surface to timber deck bridges within the National Park.
- The Authority organised and hosted a study day for staff from a range of other National Parks looking at Coastal Change in general, and the proposed new right for coastal access in particular.
- The Authority hosted a visit from the National Parks' Sustainable Development Officers' Working Group which involved site visits to a range of Sustainable Development Funded projects, presentations on setting up local food initiatives, commoning and the Waterside Community Ranger project, and sharing best practice on corporate sustainability and reducing the environmental impact of authorities' work.

- Staff attended the final walk of the 'Walking in Mind' health walks programme. The next 12-week programme, which is supported by the Authority, will be led by Primary Care Trust staff who have been trained to lead walks. Primary Care Trust staff report positive benefits from the programme, and evaluation will continue.

## Information and Visitor Services

### 6 Corporate Plan

- The fourth edition of the Authority's newsletter, *Park Life*, was published and distributed at the end of October including the animal emergency hotlines card. **(A1, U3)**
- Work started to produce DVD copies of the short introductory film about the National Park, *A Special Place*, for wider distribution. **(A1, U3, U4)**
- Work continued on the remaining 12 education factsheets to be published later in the financial year. **(U4)**
- The first batch of 18 boundary markers has been installed and publicised and the response has been very favourable. The Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group has recommended installation of the remaining 32 markers and that the Authority should continue to work with the Highways Agency in order to mark the boundary at each end of the A31/M27. Significant progress has been made with removing some unnecessary signs and in identifying ways in which many more can be rationalised. Initially this will involve pilot routes and particularly cluttered locations. **(U3)**
- The first batch of four awareness panels was installed at the New Forest Centre in early November. **(U3)**
- Work continued to plan next year's National Park events programme of walks and talks in conjunction with partners. **(U3)**
- Research continued on projects in the next phase of the Interpretation Strategy including a mobile display unit, standard exhibition, village information points and innovative walks leaflets. **(U3)**
- Initial work to involve young people in consultation about the Management Plan has started through contact with schools and a local theatre group. **(U4)**

## 7 Partnership working

- Joint work progressed with the Forestry Commission to feature the National Park extensively in the 2008 edition of their visitor and resident newspaper *Forest Focus* **(A1, C2, U3)**
- The *New Forest Today* magazine with four pages of National Park stories was published in partnership with New Forest District Council and the Forestry Commission **(A1, C2, U3)**
- To raise awareness of the danger of animal accidents, Agisters were provided with portable temporary signs informing motorists that a casualty has occurred at that location in the last week. **(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)**

## 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)**
- The Information and Visitor Services team was heavily involved in organisation and publicity for the visit by the National Parks Minister, Jonathan Shaw MP.

## Planning Policy

### 9 Corporate Plan

#### Spatial Planning Policies (A4)

- The Minerals Plan Development Plan Document Preferred Options has now been published for consultation by the National Park Authority, Portsmouth and Southampton City Councils and Hampshire County Council. The document sets out draft proposals for minerals extraction and landfill. No new sites are identified within the New Forest National Park, although some are proposed in New Forest District in the vicinity of the National Park boundary. The consultation period lasts from 31 October to 12 December 2007.
- The inaugural stakeholder event for the Management Plan, Recreation Management Strategy and Core Strategy took place at Beaulieu Road Hotel on 12 October. The event was attended by nearly 100 delegates from a range of groups with interests in the New Forest, and looked at the big issues facing the National Park.

The Authority also held a workshop on 19 October looking at the 'external forces for change' in the New Forest.

- Further topic group stakeholder workshops took place in November, looking at Conservation and Enhancement; Understanding and Enjoyment; and Living and Working in the National Park. These workshops involved smaller specialist groups looking in detail at policy options and priority actions.
- New Forest District Council has published for consultation its Core Strategy Preferred Options, which sets out the strategic planning approach within the District outside the National Park for the next twenty years, including the broad distribution of housing and employment development. The Authority is a statutory consultee and the Authority's draft response is a separate Agenda item.

## 10 Other work

- The Authority has now received a response from the National Air Traffic Services (NATS) to our detailed comments on the proposed airspace expansion over some of the more tranquil areas of the National Park. Despite receiving over 500 objections, NATS is recommending its proposals to the Civil Aviation Authority unaltered. Authority staff gave a presentation to the New Forest Consultative Panel on 15 November to raise awareness of the proposals and encourage others to respond directly to the Civil Aviation Authority, who will make the final decision on the proposals.

## 11 Development Control

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

**Planning applications: received 108.** Applications were registered within three working days following receipt.

**Planning decisions: 137 issued**, of which 94 were approved (67%) and 29 were refused (21%). Three applications were withdrawn. Eleven (8%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 16 October. In addition there were also eleven prior notifications issued.

74% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 70% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

**Live planning applications: 317 at 31 October**, compared with 350 at 30 September.

**Appeals:** Five new appeals received this month. Of the eight appeal decisions in October, four were allowed and three dismissed and one withdrawn.

**Enforcement:** 52 new enforcement cases were registered in October and 41 cases were closed. There were 283 outstanding enforcement cases at the end of the month.

One enforcement notice was served requiring the removal of a mobile home related to a livery business.

## 12 Environmental Design

- The team was consulted by Development Control on 64 applications during October, 22 of which were returned within the 14 day target, 9 were outside the target date and 33 are still live. **(Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7)**
- Consultants are progressing well with the review of conservation areas in the National Park (**Corporate Plan, C7**). The first area, Forest South East, around the parishes of Boldre, East Boldre and surrounding area, was the subject of a public consultation on 24 and 25 October. Open afternoon/evenings with displays were held in Boldre and East Boldre which were well attended. The public consultation closed on 16 November. A report will be presented at the January Authority meeting. Survey work has been completed on the second area, which includes the areas of Minstead, Bramshaw and North Copythorne. A similar public consultation took place on 4 and 5 December.
- Eighteen tree work applications were registered during October, 26 determined, 92% of which within the 8 week target date.

## 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, including the preparation of a workplan for the Standards Committee, following a discussion at the Standards Committee meeting on 18 October.
- The Member Services equality and diversity Champion made arrangements for an equality and disability assessment to be carried out on a Planning Development Control Committee meeting by a representative of the New Forest Disability Information Service.
- Other work undertaken by the section included monitoring complaints and Freedom of Information requests received by the Authority. The section presented routine update reports on

complaints to the Authority's Management Board and Standards Committee.

- Member Services compiled and distributed updates to the members' Authority document folders following the adoption by the Authority of a revised Code of Conduct and Scheme of Delegations.
- The section also streamlined the members' training programme, made arrangements for the first sessions in the programme and distributed the programme for members' comments.
- Member Services also provides support to the New Forest Consultative Panel and, in addition to arranging and supporting meetings of the Panel and a training event for new Panel members, has prepared and distributed the new Panel handbook and is finalising work on a new Panel leaflet.

## **Corporate services**

### **14 Human Resources**

- As at the end of November the Authority had 68 of staff of whom 11 are part time, 12 are on fixed term contracts and 1 post is externally funded. There are no current vacancies. Jo Holmes becomes substantive in her role as Web Content Developer from 10 December 2007. Sue Castleton formally joins us on 7 January 2007 as HR Manager (maternity cover) but will spend some days in December completing a handover with Cathie Turner-Jones. Lucie Sneddon joins us at the beginning of February 2008 as Compliance Officer (Planning).
- This month Di Buck left the Authority to join Hampshire Fire Brigade and Doug England joined on 22 October as a Community Ranger, on a one year secondment from the National Trust.
- Julie Hilton and Claire Sheppard joined the Authority as Planning Administration Officers. Julie is permanent full time member of staff and Claire joined on a part time two year fixed term contract in the same team.
- Further consultations with Unison officers on the Authority's draft HR Policies took place in October and November and good progress is being made.
- The Authority's Management Board approved the draft Investors In People (IIP) action plan. This plan includes a target to apply for a preliminary assessment in December 2008 to refine future action plans to achieve accreditation by December 2009.

## 15 ICT

- Further improvements have been made to the Planning Service's Acolaid system to streamline production of reports to the Development Control Committee, leading to efficiency gains in Development Control and Members Services.
- The Authority has purchased a three dimensional modelling package that will interface with the existing geographical information system and improve the visualisation and presentation of mapping data.
- Recent upgrading of the email filters has reduced the amount of unwanted email overall and out of 2900 intercepted spam emails only 25 were received by staff.

## 16 Finance and Performance

- The Authority changed its telephone line supplier in October. It is expected that the new supply will reduce costs by approximately £2000 per annum. In addition the monitoring information provided by the new supplier will enable the Authority to further control costs.
- Budget planning for next year and beyond will start in earnest in December.
- The financial services market test continues, with visits to alternative service providers and consideration of their proposals. A decision on the way forward will be made in December by the Resources and Performance Committee.

### **Recommendation**

**To note the report.**