

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 28 JUNE 2007

A STATEMENT OF SPECIAL QUALITIES FOR THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK

Report by: Stephen Trotter, Director of Conservation, Recreation and Sustainable Development

Summary:

1. This report summarises the feedback the Authority received from the consultation on the interim statement of special qualities which was held earlier this year.
2. A number of amendments are suggested as a result of the consultation.

Recommendations:

- 1 **To note the responses received.**
- 2 **To approve the revised statement of special qualities for inclusion in the forthcoming Management Plan.**

Resources and Corporate Plan:

None.

Corporate Plan Objective A3: Amend the statement of special qualities in line with the results of the consultation and submit for approval by the Authority

Papers:

NFNPA 191/07: Cover paper

NFNPA 191/07: Annex 1 – Details of the responses received.

NFNPA 92/06: An interim statement of special qualities

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A STATEMENT OF SPECIAL QUALITIES FOR THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK

1 Background

- 1.1 National Park status recognises the national importance of the natural beauty, cultural heritage and wildlife of the New Forest, and the significant opportunities the area affords for outdoor recreation.
- 1.2 The principal role of the National Park Authority is to ensure the two National Park purposes are achieved. These are to:
 - conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area; and
 - promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public.

In pursuing these purposes, the Authority also has the duty to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities.

- 1.3 Conservation, in broad terms, is the value driven activity of “managing the process of change so that we transfer, from the present to the future, those features of significance that we value most”.
- 1.4 As a National Park Authority, it is fundamental to the delivery of the two purposes that we understand the important features or special qualities of the area so that we can more effectively manage the process of change and improve our stewardship of the Park. The concept of ‘special qualities’ in a National Park context is derived from the National Parks and Countryside Act, 1949, and the Environment Act, 1995.
- 1.5 The purpose of a *Statement of Special Qualities* is therefore to set down those characteristics and features of the New Forest that give it its uniqueness and special character. The Statement will form a key part of the Management Plan and hence underpin, guide and focus the work of the Authority, our partners and stakeholders in conserving, enhancing and interpreting the New Forest.

- 1.6 The document will eventually provide a basis for monitoring and measuring the success of the Authority in looking after the New Forest over time. It will also provide a framework for:
- the management of risk in relation to the special qualities – particularly in respect of how they may be affected by climate change and development
 - promoting better understanding and enjoyment of the New Forest by visitors and local people.
- 1.7 It is hoped that the special qualities we identify should go to the core of what makes the New Forest unique and therefore be long lasting. However, they are not set in tablets of stone and the list of special qualities will require periodic review as the New Forest continues to evolve and change over time.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 The Authority approved an interim statement of special qualities on 18 May 2006. The summary list is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: The National Park's interim list of special qualities (2006)

<p>The New Forest National Park's landscape is unique; it is a 'living' and working remnant of medieval England with a powerful sense of continuity, tradition and history. It is the survival of not just one special quality but a whole range of features that brings a sense of completeness and integrity. These features include:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ the New Forest's outstanding natural beauty: the sights, sounds and smells of ancient woodland, heather-covered heath, unspoilt coastline, autumn colour▪ an extraordinary diversity of plants and animals including wild deer, rare birds and reptiles▪ a unique historic and cultural heritage from royal hunting ground to ship-building and strong local communities with distinct character▪ commoning and the historic grazing system that maintains so much of what people know and love as 'the New Forest'▪ the iconic New Forest Pony together with donkeys, pigs and cattle roaming free▪ wonderful opportunities for quiet recreation, learning and discovery in one of the last extensive, open landscapes in the south▪ a healthy environment: fresh air, clean water, local produce, tranquillity, a sense of 'wildness'▪ strong literary and scientific connections

- 2.2 This earlier document was based on work initially undertaken with stakeholders by the New Forest Committee for the New Forest Strategy. This was supplemented by information produced from a member's workshop, quiz and discussions with a range of Statutory Bodies during the spring of 2006.
- 2.3 As it was considered important to secure as wide a consensus as possible on the special qualities, the Authority decided to undertake a public consultation before finally endorsing a list of the special qualities to inform our future strategies, plans and policies. This consultation ran from November 2006 to the end of March 2007.

3 The consultation process

- 3.1 A wide range of individuals and organisations were approached for their views on the special qualities. The process is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: The consultation process

Talks and presentations	A series of talks and presentations were given to organisations in and around the New Forest at which the special qualities were raised and organisations invited to comment, including <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The New Forest Consultative Panel▪ Statutory Bodies▪ National Park Authority staff▪ Several local societies
Formal consultation	All member organisations of the Consultative Panel and Statutory Bodies were invited to submit their views on the interim statement by letter
Leaflet and questionnaire	From December 2006 – March 2007, a leaflet and questionnaire was issued to give the general public an opportunity to comment. This was distributed in visitor centres, offices, libraries and other outlets. The consultation materials were also available on the Authority website. The consultation received wide coverage in the local media
Informal public consultation	A series of interviews was carried out with members of the public at the New Forest Show in 2006

- 3.2 A number of responses were received from our partner organisations and 393 questionnaires were returned plus a number of other comments from individuals. The results from the consultation are set out in Annex 1.

4 Summary of responses

4.1 In general, the feedback received provides good evidence of strong support amongst our stakeholders and the public for most of the special qualities identified in the interim statement. It is therefore proposed that the first seven headline special qualities are retained:

- the New Forest's outstanding natural beauty: the sights, sounds and smells of ancient woodland, heather-covered heath, unspoilt coastline, autumn colour
- an extraordinary diversity of plants and animals including wild deer, rare birds and reptiles
- a unique historic and cultural heritage from royal hunting ground to ship-building and strong local communities with distinct character
- commoning and the historic grazing system that maintains so much of what people know and love as 'the New Forest'
- the iconic New Forest Pony together with donkeys, pigs and cattle roaming free
- wonderful opportunities for quiet recreation, learning and discovery in one of the last extensive, open landscapes in the south
- a healthy environment: fresh air, clean water, local produce, tranquillity, a sense of 'wildness'

4.2 The only quality that was less well supported was that of 'strong literary and scientific connections'. This seemed to have less resonance with stakeholders than the other identified special qualities. Although it is clearly an important attribute of the New Forest, it is proposed that this is removed from the main list but retained as part of the detailed analysis relating to cultural heritage.

4.3 A significant proportion of respondents identified some additional headline attributes. These are listed below and, subject to members' views, it is proposed that they should be included in the summary list.

Possible additional special qualities or those requiring greater emphasis

4.4 *Freedom of access on foot and horseback to extensive areas of unenclosed land* (approximately 22% of responses)

This quality of ease of access to unenclosed places of relative wilderness was felt by many respondents to be of great significance in the context of lowlands of the south and east.

4.5 *Strong rural and village communities* (approximately 3% of responses)

There was a strong feeling by a few respondents that the strong sense of community identity, pride in the New Forest and the interest in taking local action to protect against threats to its traditional character should be recognised.

4.6 *A working landscape* (approximately 2.5% of responses)

Some respondents identified the fact that the New Forest is still a landscape where people work and make a living alongside its many conservation designations as a special feature. This is fundamental to the local economy and cultural heritage and still directly and indirectly supports the day to day lives of many in the local community.

4.7 *Tranquillity*

There were a large number of references to the importance of this quality which would justify placing greater emphasis on this attribute.

4.8 *Recreational qualities*

There were strong representations to include '*opportunities to walk with dogs*' (approximately 11% of replies) in the list. There were also proposals that '*horse riding*' and '*model aircraft flying*' should also be added.

4.8.1 The question is whether these activities are adequately covered by the reference to 'quiet recreation' in the interim statement and, indeed, whether there is something about these activities in the New Forest context which is of regional or national significance that would justify a specific listing.

4.8.2 In terms of *dog walking*, a number of people felt that the New Forest is a very special, unrivalled and important place where people can walk their dogs off the lead – with opportunities that are not available elsewhere. Virtually all of those expressing this view stressed that responsible dog

ownership was important and that dogs should be under control when there was a risk of disturbance to wildlife. On the other hand, a number of respondents (approximately 7%) felt that dogs 'running off the lead' was a specific threat to other special qualities (notably through disturbance to wildlife and other users – and dog mess). However, the ability to exercise dogs on CROW access land and common land is widely available elsewhere throughout the UK. The pleasure of dog walking in the New Forest is a function of the freedom to roam / ease of access of the National Park and so it is proposed that this should **not** merit status as a special quality that is virtually unique to the New Forest.

4.8.3 However, it is widely recognised that the New Forest provides exceptional opportunities for horse riding across an extensive open landscape. This is probably an almost unique attribute of the New Forest as in other places countryside access is largely restricted to rights on foot and bridleways only. It is therefore suggested that horse riding is **incorporated in the special quality covering access**.

4.8.4 Again, as with dog walking, model aircraft flying does not appear to be practised in any different way from many other places across the UK where Clubs negotiate individual access agreements. Aircraft flying is arguably not in keeping with the idea of quiet enjoyment of the National Park and although this does not in anyway undermine the legitimacy of this activity, it is **not appropriate** to consider this as a special quality.

5 Revised Statement of Special Qualities

5.1 The revised list is presented in Table 5 below. Changes reflecting responses from the consultation are show in italics.

Table 5: Revised List of Special Qualities

The New Forest National Park's landscape is unique; it is a 'living' and working remnant of medieval England with a powerful sense of continuity, tradition and history. It is the survival of not just one special quality but a whole range of features that brings a sense of completeness and integrity. These features include:

- the New Forest's outstanding natural beauty: the sights, sounds and smells of ancient woodland with large veteran trees, heathland, bog, autumn colour and an unspoilt coastline, with views of the Solent and Isle of Wight
- an extraordinary diversity of plants and animals, many of international importance
- a unique *archaeological*, historic and cultural heritage, from royal hunting ground, to ship-building, *a salt making industry and nearly 500 years of military coastal defence*

- an historic commoning system that maintains so much of what people know and love as 'the New Forest' through grazing
- the iconic New Forest Pony together with donkeys, pigs and cattle roaming free
- *a working landscape based on commoning, farming and forestry*
- *tranquility at the heart of the busy and built up south*
- wonderful opportunities for quiet recreation, learning and discovery in one of the last extensive gentle landscapes in the south including unmatched *free access on foot and horseback*
- a healthy environment: fresh air, clean water *and* a sense of 'wildness'
- *strong and distinctive rural and village communities with a real sense of identity and great pride in their local area*

6 Next steps

- 6.1 The revised and approved version will be sent to Statutory Bodies. Their key members and officers will be reminded of the Section 62 responsibilities and invited to sign up to the new Statement. We will invite each organisation to make their commitment to achieving the National Park vision and to outline how they will help us to make the protection of the New Forest's special qualities a reality.
- 6.2 A communication plan and publicity campaign will be prepared to publicise the Statement and promote understanding and awareness of the special qualities. As part of this plan, Officers will prepare three versions of the document.
- 6.3 Firstly, a version in a visual pictorial form (that can be adapted to leaflet / website / poster format) to assist in communicating and explaining the messages to a wide range of stakeholders and the public.
- 6.4 Secondly, a standard written version for use in the Authority's Corporate Plan using the wording in Table 5.
- 6.5 Thirdly, a more detailed Statement which will be used internally and with close partners – although it will of course be openly available. This will take the form of a detailed risk assessment tool to help in managing and monitoring change – and guiding any future actions the Authority may wish to take. A further members' workshop may be required to finalise this assessment as discussed at the Authority meeting in May 2006.
- 6.6 Stakeholders will also be invited to sign up to the special qualities at the consultation workshops planned for the preparation of the National Park Management Plan in the autumn of 2007. There may be some further discussion on the precise definitions of special qualities at this stage.

Recommendations:

- 1 To note the responses received.**
- 2 To approve the revised statement of special qualities for inclusion in the forthcoming Management Plan.**