



Mr Jeff Coast  
Protected Landscapes Team  
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16 February 2011

Dear Mr Coast

**Consultation on the governance arrangements for the National Parks and the Broads – New Forest National Park Authority response**

On the 10 February, the New Forest National Park Authority considered its response to the Government's '*Consultation on the governance arrangements for the National Parks and the Broads*' document. The Authority has undertaken extensive awareness raising and publicity locally relating to the review since it was launched in November 2010. Alongside the Authority's own response, for your information I have attached (i) the Authority paper which members considered, setting out a range of options and the local consultation undertaken; and (ii) the summary of the 57 responses received during the consultation that relate specifically to the New Forest National Park.

The Authority's members gave detailed consideration to all of the consultation responses and debated at length both the issues contained therein and various proposals and ideas suggested by members at the meeting. At the conclusion of the discussions, the members agreed a number of recommended changes to the governance arrangements of the Authority to improve transparency and increase local accountability, including:

- Ensuring that the criteria for the appointment of the 12 local authority members are made more transparent.
- Removing the role of the Secretary of State in formally appointing the 4 Parish Council members.
- Recommending that the Secretary of State consults closely with the National Park Authority, the Verderers of the New Forest and the Chair of the New Forest Consultative Panel in selecting the 'national' appointees.

The Authority considers that provided these changes are made, the basic composition of the membership – comprising of local authority members,

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CHAIRMAN JULIAN JOHNSON CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

Parish Council members and the Secretary of State 'national appointees' - should be retained and the size of the membership should remain at 22 to ensure there are sufficient resources to engage with local communities.

For your information, the Authority's detailed responses under each of the key review questions are set out below.

***(a) Changes to the size and composition of the Authority's membership***

The contribution of the existing local authority, parish council and 'national' categories of Authority membership is supported and the basic composition should be retained.

The Authority supports the contribution of the Secretary of State appointed 'national' members in representing the wider interests in our National Parks and wishes this category of membership to be retained. The Authority would welcome greater input into the appointment of 'national' members, and suggests that the Secretary of State consults with the Authority, the Verderers of the New Forest, and the Chair of the New Forest Consultative Panel in appointing 'national' members to the Authority. This would help to ensure the appointees bring relevant skills and expertise to the New Forest.

If the Secretary of State feels that further changes are required, the Authority is willing to discuss the scope for introducing a proportion of directly locally elected members to broaden the membership and complement the existing categories. The Government would need to consider the financial implications of introducing direct elections.

The Authority supports maintaining the existing size of the membership at 22 to ensure there is a range of knowledge within the membership and sufficient resources to engage with local communities.

***(b) Improvements to the selection process for all membership categories***

The feedback from the local consultation in the New Forest is that the selection process for all categories of members could be more transparent. The criteria for the appointment of local authority members should be made more openly available. The formal role of the Secretary of State in effectively ratifying the four Parish Council appointees should be removed as it is perceived by some as reducing local accountability. The National Park Authority and the local community (including the Verderers of the New Forest and the New Forest Consultative Panel) should be more closely involved in the Secretary of State's appointment of the 'national' members, ensuring the opportunities are widely publicised and that the appointments bring relevant skills to the Authority.

**(c) A time limit on the length of service**

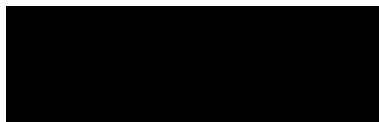
The Authority supports the retention of the existing 10 year limit on the length of term for Secretary of State 'national' appointees. The Authority does not, on balance, support the introduction of a limit on the length of time which local authority and parish members can serve as this could result in Authority members being replaced prematurely.

**(d, e & f) Changes to consultative committees, and strengthening engagement**

The New Forest National Park Authority is already well engaged with local communities and is keen to improve this engagement further. The Authority supports the call from the New Forest Consultative Panel for more formal recognition of its role in bringing together a diverse range of New Forest National Park stakeholders. The Authority supports the proposed changes to the rules on pre-determination through the Localism Bill. If enacted, this would give Authority members greater freedom to speak on locally important matters while at the same time taking a Park wide view. The Authority will continue to develop its engagement with local communities in and around the National Park through the Parish Council Quadrant meetings and other routes (e.g. the ranger service, the engagement strategy suggested by Hampshire County Council).

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries on the Authority's response and I look forward to hearing the Government's decision on the review in due course.

Yours sincerely



Julian Johnson  
Chairman  
New Forest National Park Authority

Enc.

- (i) Authority Paper NFNPA368/11 – National Park Governance Review, New Forest National Park Authority response (considered 10.02.11)
- (ii) Summary of governance consultation responses relating specifically to the New Forest National Park