

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 24 JANUARY 2008

**RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION DRAFT OF 'FUTURE MATTERS':
THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY FOR NEW FOREST
DISTRICT 2008 - 2012**

Report by: Sarah Applegate, Senior Planning Officer

Summary:

New Forest District Council is consulting on a draft Sustainable Community Strategy, in conjunction with the Changing Lives Partnership which is the Local Strategic Partnership for the New Forest District. The Strategy covers New Forest District, including the constituent part of the New Forest National Park. It sets out a vision of what New Forest District will be like in 2026, priority issues, a set of objectives to help deliver the Strategy by the end of 2012 and flagship projects.

This report outlines the National Park Authority's response to the consultation.

Recommendation:

To authorise the Director of Strategy and Planning to submit a response to the draft New Forest District Sustainable Community Strategy based on the comments outlined in this report.

Resources and Corporate Plan:

A4 – Develop spatial planning policies to support the delivery of the National Park's purposes and duties.

Routine resources

Paper:

NFNPA 228/08: Cover paper
NFNPA 228/08 Annex 1: Future Matters - the Draft Sustainable Community Strategy for the New Forest District (circulated separately)

Background papers:

NFNPA 180/07: Response to the Future Matters Issues and Options consultation

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Local Government Act 2000 places on principal local authorities a duty to prepare 'Community Strategies', for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas, and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK. The Sustainable Communities Act 2007 changed the emphasis and name from 'Community strategy' to 'Sustainable Community Strategy'.
- 1.2 National Park Authorities are not required to prepare a Sustainable Community Strategy for their area, but their Local Development Frameworks must take into account the Sustainable Community Strategies covering their area (i.e. those of Test Valley Borough, Salisbury District, Hampshire and Wiltshire Counties, as well as New Forest District). National park authorities are however required to prepare a National Park Management Plan which has a number of similarities with Sustainable Community Strategies. The New Forest National Park Authority is a member of the Local Strategic Partnership for the New Forest District.
- 1.3 The first Community Strategy for New Forest District was published in 2003 and covered the period to mid 2007. Consultation on the key issues for the revised Sustainable Community Strategy was undertaken through an Issues and Options consultation in December 2006. This consultation was carried out jointly with New Forest District to inform not only the revised Sustainable Community Strategy, but also the District and National Park Core Spatial Strategies and the National Park Management Plan.
- 1.4 The draft Sustainable Community Strategy, 'Future Matters', sets out:
 - a vision for the District in 2026;
 - medium term objectives to be achieved by 2012;
 - priority issues for 13 topics; and
 - six flagship projects.

2. Response to the consultation draft

- 2.1 The introduction to the Strategy clearly states that it is not about organisations, but is about communities. It would be helpful therefore if the introductory section outlined the history and cultural heritage of the area and the highly distinctive “living culture” and strong sense of local identity evident today. At present this is a significant gap in the document. The strongest thread of shared community identity running through the District is that which is held for the New Forest; yet the “New Forest” in itself as a place, tradition, culture and community is not mentioned in the introduction, medium term objectives, nor flagship projects.
- 2.2 The document should describe the culture and identity of the New Forest and what makes the place and its communities locally distinctive. This would provide an overarching context for the topics covered in the strategy.

Economy topic and priorities

- 2.3 Recognition that the environment is an economic asset for the tourism sector is welcomed. It is the exceptional quality and distinctiveness of the local natural environment of the District that is the basis of the tourism industry. Elsewhere however the quality of the natural environment is cited as a constraint on development. The quality of the local natural environment, strong image and quality of life in the area can help attract inward investment and retain a local workforce. More explicit recognition should be given to the role that the environment and quality of life associated with the New Forest has in attracting and retaining non-tourism businesses and workforce.
- 2.4 Jonathan Shaw, Rural Affairs Minister, announcing in December 2007 the £9.6m increase in funding for all national parks confirmed that “*National parks are not just beautiful and historic parts of the countryside, but places where people want to live and work*”.
- 2.5 The Economy topic could be further strengthened by emphasising the links to be made with encouraging more business activity that is founded on the sustainable use of the local natural environment; and greater emphasis should be given to the environmental sustainability of new businesses.

Built environment topic and priorities

- 2.6 The draft Strategy recognises the rich built heritage and importance of conserving and enhancing the built environment. This is supported. Likewise the aspiration to raise design quality across the District and to strive for new development to be shown to “be positively beneficial” is one shared by the Authority.

- 2.7 The reference made to a need to secure quality and accessible open space is supported. This should be further strengthened by reference to the importance of integrating “green infrastructure” e.g. open space for informal recreation into the built environment.
- 2.8 It would be useful for the Strategy to also refer to the Countryside Access Plan which highlights the shortage of accessible open space for recreation and routine exercise within or close to settlements, and the lack of attractive and suitable car-free routes linking settlements with the countryside.

Natural environment topic and priorities

- 2.9 The context set out describing the variety and quality of the natural environment, particularly priority 5.4, which recognises the need to manage the impact of development on the natural environment, is welcomed. However, this should be strengthened and a priority action be included directly to recognise the strong emphasis on the need to manage development pressures in and around the National Park that was given by 96% of respondents to the “Future Matters Issues and Options” consultation in December 2006. It was the single most popular response identified by respondents in the ‘Natural environment and landscape’ topic.
- 2.10 In addition to designated nature conservation sites and rural areas, urban areas can also make a contribution to the wealth of biodiversity within the District. It would be useful if the importance of urban areas for wildlife was recognised.

Environmental protection and the wise use of natural resources topic and priorities

- 2.11 Reference to the impacts of climate change is welcomed, but the Strategy should include a specific reference to reducing the ‘environmental / ecological / carbon footprint’ of the District. This is intrinsically linked to the global challenges mentioned, which include wider sustainability issues relating to resource consumption, including the movement of goods, total energy costs of services, water and energy conservation as well as renewable resources.
- 2.12 In addition, the issues relating to sea-level rise and coastline management (other than flooding), which are mentioned in the context, should be included in the priority list, together with outcomes covering habitat impacts and re-creation.
- 2.13 This topic also identifies the blight of pollution and litter which is followed up in the list of priorities, but it does not set out how this might be achieved. Litter is a particular concern for the National Park and

significant efforts are made to raise awareness of this and give opportunity for community participation in litter picks. It would be helpful if priority 6.5 was strengthened by inclusion of an outcome demonstrating, through targeted surveys, a reduction in litter lying within the National Park.

Housing topic and priorities

- 2.14 The clear identification of housing affordability as a significant issue affecting the area, including the lack of affordable housing for New Forest Commoners is supported.

Leisure topic and priorities

- 2.15 The issues and priorities for leisure are largely supported.
- 2.16 Making the most of local leisure facilities (priority 9.2) should also include planning new leisure provision to cater for future demand, and as a means of managing leisure and recreation. This would allow for the appropriate promotion of leisure facilities, programmes and events, and could target specific issues such as reducing transport miles or honey pot site usage.
- 2.17 Priority 9.3 relates to the importance of improving accessibility to leisure events and activities by public transport, which is fully supported. It would help to also refer to improved accessibility to both indoor and outdoor leisure sites. This may help promote increased activity and improved public transport for children and young people.

Tourism topic and priorities

- 2.18 The key issues for tourism and priorities for management and development of sustainable initiatives are clearly set out and welcomed.

Transport topic and priorities

- 2.19 There is no mention of public transport, visitor transport or integrated transport networks within the list of transport priorities or outcomes, despite issues being flagged up in the context. Where there are significant issues to be addressed, such as improvements to public transport, they should be listed as a priority.
- 2.20 This topic is primarily focussed on utility transport use. Given the New Forest context, including tourism, rights of way and cycle networks, it should be extended to deal with issues and priorities affecting recreational transport users.

- 2.21 The prevalence of animal accidents in the New Forest, particularly on unfenced roads in and around the National Park is described. The Authority, New Forest District Council and Hampshire County Council are involved in a number of initiatives to improve road safety and reduce animal accidents and the outcomes of priority 12.3 should include reduction of animal accidents.

Flagship projects

- 2.22 The Local Strategic Partnership has developed some specific projects that, "it wishes to progress during the life of the strategy that demonstrate strong partnership working aimed at some of the priorities". Six projects are identified under three themes of Community engagement; Children and young people; and Economic skills development.
- 2.23 While it is recognised that flagship projects by their nature are selective and limited in number, it is hard to believe that a "New Forest" project based on one of a number of current initiatives that are strongly based on multi-organisation and community partnership could not be beneficially included. Such a project would complement those already selected and provide a better overall balance across the "sustainable" spectrum the Strategy is meant to address. The Local Strategic Partnership should be asked to give further consideration to making such an addition to the selected flagship projects.

Recommendation

To authorise the Director of Strategy and Planning to submit a response to the draft New Forest District Sustainable Community Strategy based on the comments outlined in this report.