

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 26 JUNE 2008

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 22 May 2008 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in May.

Recommendation:

To note the report

Paper:

NFNPA 259/08: Cover paper

Contact:

Lindsay Cornish
Tel: 01590 646633
Email: lindsay.cornish@newforestnpa.gov.uk

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 26 JUNE 2008

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

- 1 This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 22 May 2008 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in May.

Members

- 2 Some members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events:

- Members' briefing and discussion on Recreation Management Strategy, following the Authority meeting on 22 May
- Chairman's informal briefing session, 30 May
- Cross boundary transport and highways members' meeting with Dorset and Hampshire County Councils and a number of District Councils, 30 May (represented by Steve Trotter)
- New Forest Access Forum meeting, 2 June
- Recreation Management Strategy informal briefing and discussion, 13 June
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association Annual meeting, 13 June (represented by Chief Executive in Ted Johnson's absence)
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 17 June
- Standards Committee training on local determination of complaints, 20 June
- Tree Preservation Order Objection Panel meeting, 24 June
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 25 June

- 3 Forthcoming activities include:

- English National Park Authorities Association Annual meeting, 9 July
- UK Association of National Park Authorities Annual General meeting, 10 July
- New Forest Consultative Panel meeting, 10 July
- Core Strategy Joint Members Advisory Group, 18 July
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 22 July

- National Parks Week, 28 July to 3 August
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 19 August
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 28 August
- New Forest Consultative Panel meeting, 4 September
- New Forest Access Forum meeting, 8 September
- New Forest Consultative Panel tour, 9 September

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

Conservation, Recreation and Sustainable Development

4 Partnership working

Funding

- Staff arranged a meeting of key partners to discuss 'outreach work' projects in and around the New Forest and the possibility of a joint bid to the new Access to Nature fund which has recently been launched by Natural England. This is at an early stage and further discussions will be needed to develop the proposals.
- The External Funding Officer met representatives of the New Forest Trust and an architect to discuss a potential design, construction and costs for the roof of the sales ring at Beaulieu Road Sales Yard.
- Officers also provided funding advice for a number of smaller projects including a Community Education Post at the New Forest Centre, a Village Wells Restoration Scheme for Redlynch Parish Council and a Commoning History Project.

5 Corporate Plan

Landscape (C2)

- The Authority's landscape officer has organised a survey to be carried out of important clumps of Scots Pine in the Forest, using Pasmore and Lavender's study of 1973 and the Forestry Commission's Study in 1977, as baselines from which to monitor any change. The survey is expected to take approximately two weeks and will result in a written report of the location and condition of 'important stands' of pine trees from a landscape and visual perspective. This will help to inform the future Landscape Strategy.
- The Landscape Officer attended the inaugural meeting of National Park Landscape Officers to discuss several matters that are of relevance to the New Forest including: the definition and significance of 'Landscape Setting', development pressures of all types (including wind farms), tranquillity, sharing best practice for

Landscape Character Assessments and Landscape Strategies and Natural England's consultation process for its new Landscape Policy.

Nature conservation (C3)

- The Ecologist continues to support the development of the National Park Plan and Recreation Management Strategy documents through the provision of advice to colleagues. This has included further work on Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessments for a variety of strategies.

Conservation of cultural heritage (C6)

- Three Historic Environment Data Requests for the Farm Environment Plan process have been completed involving site visits by the Authority's Archaeologist and Landscape Officer.
- The Archaeologist attended a meeting reviewing the archaeological work on the Hampshire Mineral Extraction Areas funded by the Aggregates Levy. The draft report on the National Archaeological Mapping programme was made available and includes parts of the National Park in the Avon Valley, Ringwood and New Milton areas.
- The archaeological records accumulated by the Authority over the past year were examined as part of the English Heritage, Archaeological Investigations Project undertaken by Bournemouth University, as part of their annual review and updating of the national data base.

Recreation (U1)

- The Recreation Officer attended a Countryside Recreation Network conference at which the report 'Volunteering in the Natural Outdoors' was launched. The purpose of the report is to explore how volunteering fits with current and developing trends in the countryside and how opportunities for this form of volunteering can be enhanced and encouraged and its potential realised. Further consideration is being given to how the Authority can contribute to the coordination and development of countryside volunteering in the National Park.
- A new seasonal Ranger for the coast has been appointed on a temporary contract. This is a pilot project jointly funded and administered by the Authority and Hampshire County Council. The responsibilities of the post include organising coastal events, education and imparting behavioural messages to visitors on the coast, along with outreach work with local communities, organised groups and schools.

Traffic, transport and tourism (U2)

- The New Forest Tour began its 100 days summer season on 24 May complete with a new commentary aimed at enabling customers to understand and enjoy the experience even more. A second launch will follow ahead of the main school summer holidays, which will be accompanied by an innovative educational resource to keep children entertained on the journey. More details can be found on the website at www.thenewforesttour.info
- Staff have continued to work with New Forest District Council's Tourism Service to update the current Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the New Forest. The issues were discussed at a recent meeting of the New Forest Tourism Community Action Network.

Access (U6)

- Staff have now prepared and sent out invitations for contractors to tender for the provision of site-based accessibility information. This aims to improve the information that disabled people have about where they can go in the National Park. This phase of the project will involve the design of a searchable database, collection of data from two pilot sites, and production of information in a format for publication. The pilot sites chosen are Lymington/Keyhaven Nature Reserve and land around Blackwater car park. This phase of the project will be completed by August.
- A site visit was made to the Pleasure Grounds at Milford on Sea to look at potential improvements to site entrances, which will make the site more accessible to people with mobility limitations. The Authority's Small Grants Scheme extends to sites outside of the National Park where improvements to and promotion of local sites will be of benefit, including by reducing pressures on the National Park.

Sustainable Development (SE1)

- Officers attended the steering group of the Living Register project to agree final project outcomes and project exhibition. They also attended New Forest Farm Advisors steering group meeting and the Verderers Welfare Tour to look at the welfare of stock on the Open Forest.
- The Sustainable Development Fund Officer carried out a series of project review visits / meetings and provided project support to a number of projects, particularly the Ashurst and Colbury Bags for the Future, Local Produce Events and Fairweather's Learning Garden. She also gave a talk on Sustainability Projects in the New Forest to Highcliffe Community Association Men's Forum.

- Support was given to the Lyndhurst Chamber of Trade in developing a plastic bag reduction scheme and staff took part in a publicity project for the New Forest Carbon Footprint Project.
- Planning and preparation for two forthcoming events has continued – a Wood Fuel Workshop to be held at Ipley Manor in July and a Sustainable Packaging event to be held later this summer.

Information and Visitor Services

6 Corporate Plan

- Only one of the planned 46 timber boundary markers remains to be installed. Zinc way-marker discs (for some 50 minor footpath locations) are being fixed to existing posts by County Council footpaths officers. Negotiations for trunk road boundary signs (for the A36, A31 and M27) are well-advanced. **(U3)**
- Fifteen events for 2008 have been organised and are available to view on the website 'What's On' pages. The first events have been popular and successful. **(U3)**
- Following approval by the Authority, plans for a mobile information and interpretation unit are being progressed. A 0.6-litre diesel Megavan has been ordered and Hayley Sharpe Design have been engaged to oversee interpretation and fitting out.
- Local Information Points have been selected for Brockenhurst (Best Sellers bookshop) and Beaulieu (Abbey Stores and Post Office). Signage and leaflet racks are on order and a support workshop is being organised. Interviews for another Local Information Point in Burley are in hand. **(U3)**
- The 'Your Shout' project - engaging with young people for input into the Management Plan resulted in a dramatic and thought-provoking theatre piece at the Management Plan concluding event in March. A short film has been made of the project. **(U4)**
- Initial distribution has been completed of the leaflet, poster and postcard specifically to promote the Park's special qualities. **(A1, U3)**
- The set of four postcards highlighting interesting facts about the National Park, and raising awareness of litter, wildfires, animal accidents and disturbance to ground-nesting birds is proving useful at events. **(U3)**
- Work is nearing completion that will test the usability of the National Park website two years on and to inform future developments. **(A1)**
- Planning is in the final stages for the National Park stand at the New Forest Show in July. **(A1, U3)**

7 Partnership working

- The final design for the new animal accident warning sign to replace the very large shield-shaped signs located at the start of high-risk routes is being drawn up by County and District highways officers. Staff hope they will be trialed on the B3054 Lymington to Dibden Purlieu road, as part of the wider sign rationalisation programme on this pilot route. **(U3)**
- The New Forest Centre has new exterior signage reflecting its much closer links with the National Park. The new logo includes the National Park's tree and ponies and the sign on the building is made from recycled stainless steel. Inside, there are new posters by the door, updated and new display panels, a boundary marker, new signage to guide visitors around the centre, subtitles to the film and promotion of the webcam at the Reptile Centre – all demonstrating the significant progress being made through the partnership arrangements between the Ninth Centenary Trust and the National Park Authority. **(U3)**
- The joint RSPB, Forestry Commission, Carnx Films and National Park 'Aren't Birds Brilliant! in the New Forest' project is again running well. Three goshawk chicks are on view and feedback from visitors is excellent. An awning, funded by a Sustainable Development Fund grant, has been erected over the front of the centre to encourage more people inside. **(U3)**
- Work continues to progress on a New Forest Outdoor Science Project, part-funded by the British Ecological Society. Four local secondary schools and one local Pupil Referral Unit are taking part this summer. **(U4)**
- Officers continue to meet with New Forest District Council and the Forestry Commission to find ways of reducing the amount of litter in the New Forest. **(U3)**
- Work is under way to produce the summer edition of *New Forest Today* magazine jointly with New Forest District Council and the Forestry Commission. **(A1, 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)**

Planning Policy

9 Corporate Plan

Corporate Plan Objective A3: Management Plan and Objective A4: Spatial Planning Policies

- Work has continued throughout May in developing the National Park Plan (incorporating the National Park Management Plan and the Local Development Framework Core Strategy) for consideration by members in a separate report to this meeting. The Plan will then be published for consultation over the summer. During May this work has included:
 - A workshop held with members on 16 May to discuss the format, structure and content of the draft Plan. There is a need to avoid duplication to aid the clarity of a Plan that will cover land management and spatial planning.
 - A further workshop held with members on 20 May to discuss the scope and proposed wording of the new National Park wide development control policies. These policies will ultimately replace the policies contained within the existing three local plans and cover important issues such as equestrian development, replacement dwellings and residential extensions.
- Work during May has involved the refining and editing of the draft Plan, following comments from senior officers and other directorates, and a pre-publication consultation meeting with key partners was held on 6 June. The draft objectives and policies are structured around the two National Park purposes and duty.
- The team has also been working on the Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment of the draft National Park Plan. The key conclusions of the Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment are included with the Plan for consideration by members.

10 Other work

- The team represented the Authority at the High Court hearing of Association British Ports' legal challenge to the Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and New Forest National Park Minerals and Waste Core Strategy, held from 20 - 22 May in London.
- The Policy and Plans team has also been liaising with neighbouring planning authorities over the development of their planning policies, and the need for these to take full account of the New Forest National Park. In May, this work has involved:

- A formal consultation response to Christchurch Borough Council and East Dorset District Council on their joint Core Strategy Issues and Options document. The document acknowledges the potential for development within Christchurch and East Dorset to impact on the New Forest National Park, which is welcomed, but the Authority remains concerned at the impacts of the continued expansion of Bournemouth Airport and the proposed urban extension north of Christchurch on the National Park. National Park officers, along with staff from New Forest District Council and Natural England, met with Christchurch and East Dorset at the end of May to discuss cross boundary impacts.

- Consultation responses on the Wiltshire and Swindon Minerals Core Strategy and the Waste Core Strategy. The Authority's main concern centres on the identification of a Minerals Resource Zone abutting the National Park boundary and within the area covered by the recent HCV weight restrictions. The development of such sites would undermine the purpose of the weight restrictions, which were introduced in order to address the impacts of heavy traffic on the unfenced New Forest roads.

11 Development Control

During May the Development Control team carried out the following work:

Planning applications: received 83. Applications were registered within three working days following receipt.

Planning decisions: 116 issued, of which 86 were approved (74%) and 30 were refused (26%). Ten applications were withdrawn. Eight (7%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 20 May.

85% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 94% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

Live planning applications: 340 at 31 May, compared with 384 at 30 April.

Appeals: Two new appeals received this month. There were seven appeal decisions in May. Four appeals dismissed, three allowed and one appeal was withdrawn.

Enforcement: 39 new enforcement cases were registered in May and 48 cases were closed. There were 280 outstanding enforcement cases at the end of the month. One enforcement notice and one Breach of Condition notice were served during May.

12 Environmental Design

During May the Environmental Design team carried out the following work:

- The team was consulted by Development Control on 40 applications during May, 23 of which were returned within the 14 day target. Eight are still live. **(Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7)**
- Eighteen tree work applications were registered during May and 23 determined, 100% of which within the eight week target date. One Tree Preservation Order was made.
- Work is continuing on the preparation of a draft Building Design Guide, for consultation later in the year. **(Corporate Plan Objective A4)**
- Work is continuing on a project to identify the ancient/veteran tree resource in the Park to formulate methods for future strategic management of the resource and engagement with stakeholders. An initial meeting of key project stakeholders was held with the intention to agree aims and objectives and a follow up meeting has been planned for July.

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, as well as monitoring complaints and Freedom of Information requests received by the Authority. Member Services also provides support to the New Forest Consultative Panel. The section recently facilitated a meeting of the Tree Preservation Order Objection Panel.
- Member Services has arranged various training and briefing sessions for members, including training for members and deputy members of the Standards Committee on the local determination of complaints concerning members on 20 June 2008.

14 Corporate Services

15 Business Support

- The draft 'Driving at Work Policy' has now been considered by the Authority's Management Board. Once necessary follow up work is completed the policy will be presented to Resources and Performance Committee for consideration and final approval.

- Work has continued over the last few months to resolve technical problems with the accountancy software which New Forest District Council supplies to the Authority to support the District's accountancy service. The problems have proved difficult fully to diagnose.
- Following advertisement in the Official Journal of the European Union responses from prospective development partners have been received. Final sifting of pre-qualification questionnaire responses took place at the end of May and a short list of four tenderers was selected. The procurement process now moves into the tender phase.

16 Human resources

- As of 31 May 2008 there are 69 members of staff or 64.6 full time equivalents, of whom 13 are part-time and 12 are on a fixed term contract.
- The May meeting with UNISON focused on the draft Driving at Work, Smoking, Alcohol and Substance Abuse, and Home Working policies.
- Carolyn Hoole, who has worked as an administration assistant in the Members Services team since October 2006, will be leaving the Authority on 4 July. Members and staff will miss her positive and professional presence. We wish her all the best for the future.

17 ICT

- A Geographic Information System data capture project is underway with an initial six month pilot. This work will improve the core data held on the Authority's systems by removing errors and adding additional data to the databases used by the Authority.
- As part of the development of the Environmental Practices Group base line information, ICT can now identify the amount of printed paper used by individual staff in the Authority. Paper usage will be monitored and if possible, benchmarked with other organisations. The usage figures fluctuate greatly month on month but the goal is to establish a declining trend and achieve an overall reduction in paper usage year on year.

18 Finance and performance

- New financial management arrangements resulting from the soft market test were put in place on 15 May with some elements on a six month trial basis. New Forest District Council and Hampshire County Council, including the Chief Finance Officer, now provide a joint service with reduced input from Authority staff. As part of these changes Nigel Stone from New Forest District Council is now

working at South Efford House for two days a week. He will provide the on-site interface with, and support for, Budget Responsible Officers.

- The effectiveness of the new arrangements is being monitored and a formal review will take place in November.

Recommendation

To note the report.