

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 16 OCTOBER 2008

**NEW FOREST CONSULTATIVE PANEL REPORT
SUMMARY OF THE MEETINGS ON THURSDAY 10 JULY 2008 AND
THURSDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 2008**

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

Summary:

This report outlines the main issues discussed by the Consultative Panel on 10 July and 4 September 2008.

Recommendations:

To note:

- i) **issues of interest at the meetings of the New Forest Consultative Panel on 10 July and 4 September 2008**
- ii) **the date of the next Panel meeting is Thursday 6 November 2008.**

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1. Conservation areas in the National Park

1.1 Paula Freeland gave a detailed presentation to the Panel, explaining that conservation areas were areas of special historical or architectural interest, the character of which it would be desirable to conserve. The Authority looked at the quality of area as a whole rather than at individual buildings. Eighteen conservation areas were already in existence in the area of the National Park when it was designated, and the Authority was therefore carrying out a review:

- to establish whether there were areas that were not covered by an existing designation that would merit conservation status;
- to develop a framework for the management of conservation areas, which would include individual character appraisals, a generic conservation areas management plan and individual management plans to be adopted by 2013. The generic management plan was currently out for consultation; and
- to review the boundaries of inherited conservation areas and produce character appraisals by 2009.

1.2 Panel members raised various questions and comments, including the following.

- Peter Sopowski (Ashurst and Colbury Parish Council) asked that the Authority seek to prevent people creating block paved areas of off-road parking in conservation areas. Kevin Fuller (Hampshire County Council Highways) commented that the recent independent report by Sir Michael Pitt on flooding included a recommendation that planning consent would be required for certain types of surfaces for off road parking.
- Sam Dovey (New Forest Pony Breeding and Cattle Society) asked that the Authority remember that the National Park was not a museum but somewhere that people lived and worked; centuries of change had resulted in the character of the area as it was today. Paula Freeland said that the purpose of the conservation area controls was not to prevent change but to permit only change that was of an appropriate nature.

2. Walking in the New Forest – stream and fence crossings

- 2.1 John Thackray (Ramblers' Association) gave a presentation on stream and fence crossings in the New Forest. He pointed out that walking was one of the most popular forms of public enjoyment of the New Forest, but although several publicly funded conservation bodies were active in the Forest there were none to champion walking. A number of established tracks were not easily accessible because they were waterlogged or fenced off; churned up banks or logs thrown in a stream where people commonly crossed were not conducive to conservation. Mr Thackray pointed out that it was important to preserve a sense of wildness in the Forest, but marked footpaths should be safely usable by an able-bodied person.
- 2.3 Mike Seddon (Forestry Commission) explained that there was a right of access across all of the Crown Lands. It was important to balance the provision of access with maintaining the special character of the area and the fact that it was a working forest. The Forestry Commission would work with the Ramblers' Association as far as possible to ensure that gates were in the appropriate places, but it should be noted that the provision of access was already quite high. He explained that the re-bogging of parts of the Forest was a part of habitat restoration in what were often Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and access, while important, should be achieved in a manner that was sensitive to the landscape.

3. Any other business

- 3.1 Steve Trotter explained that the Authority's boundary marker programme was nearing completion; 46 timber boundary markers had been installed at various points around the perimeter of the Park. Subsequently, a small number of these had been moved to improve traffic sight lines. Four roadside locations remained to be marked, at the side of the A31, the A36 and the M27. Whiteparish Parish Council had requested a boundary marker should not be placed by the southbound side of the A36. Zinc waymarkers would be placed at minor footpaths. He asked that Panel members contact the Authority if they became aware of damaged or vandalised boundary markers. Jack Sturgess (Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society) expressed disappointment with the signs, which he felt were not very noticeable (for example, he suggested that they compared unfavourably with the granite markers used by Dartmoor National Park Authority), and were already marked with green mould. Steve Trotter explained that the New Forest markers were intended to blend in naturally with the Forest scene over time, and the Authority's budget had been insufficient to obtain equivalent markers to those used in places like Dartmoor, but said he would pass Jack Sturgess' views to the relevant working group.
- 3.2 Kathy Gulliver (Sway Parish Council) raised the issue of the number of lorries using Forest roads as short cuts; she believed Ordnance Survey were in the process of developing Sat Nav for commercial vehicles

which did not show smaller roads. Kevin Fuller (Hampshire County Council) said this was a national issue and it was a matter of time before such software was developed. Alan Shotter (Marchwood Parish Council) asked that Kathy Gulliver write to him in his capacity as the Chairman of the New Forest Association of Local Councils (NFALC) and the matter could be discussed at the NFALC Annual meeting.

- 3.3 Peter Frost (Natural England) drew Panel members' attention to an article on the increase in littering and fly tipping in the area, published in VOICE magazine by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England. The Chairman suggested that this be discussed at the Panel meeting in November as the agenda for the September meeting was already full. Subsequently, the Environment Agency indicated that they would like to attend the meeting in November.

4. Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting

- 4.1 Several Panel members raised concern about the amount of ragwort this year and the inconsistent approach to clearance on neighbouring areas of land. Tim Greenwood (Chairman) commented that it was a multi agency issue and suggested that the Authority could coordinate the clearance effort in future years. Kevin Fuller (HCC – Highways) agreed that it had been a bumper year for ragwort and said that he had six crews out for most of the season.

5. National Park Plan

- 5.1 Nick Evans presented an overview of the National Park Plan which was out for public consultation until 31 October 2008. He explained that the draft Plan set out the long-term vision and objectives for the National Park, together with the policies and actions for the next five years and beyond. It combined two important statutory documents in a single integrated plan. These were the National Park Management Plan and the Local Development Framework Core Strategy, including Development Control policies. It was hoped that this would make the overall approach proposed for the National Park clearer for interested organisations and individuals. He confirmed that in response to public concerns regarding the proposed policy on Recreational Horse Keeping the Authority had produced an explanatory note, and urged Panel members to read this in conjunction with the draft Plan.

6. Recreation Management Strategy for the National Park

- 6.1 Steve Trotter then presented an overview of the Recreation Management Strategy. The draft Strategy sets out the strategic direction for the management of outdoor recreation in the New Forest National Park over the coming 20 years. It sought to guide and influence recreation and spatial planning policy and implementation across the whole of the National Park and adjoining areas (insofar as the latter influenced recreation within the National Park). The translation of policies into practical activity would be outlined in an action plan which would be developed with key partners over the next year.

6.2 Panel Members then raised various comments on both documents, including the following:

- Peter Roberts (New Forest Association) welcomed the documents as a serious attempt to address the issues facing the National Park and acknowledged there were areas for debate, specifically the Recreational Horse Keeping Policy. He confirmed that the Association would be making a formal response which would be published on their website. He was more critical of the Recreation Management Plan.
- Chris Aldhous (New Forest Equestrian Association) reported that the Association would produce a formal response to the documents and he hoped they could work with the Authority to produce a useful outcome. He said that the policies should be based on valid data and gave detailed statistics regarding current horse ownership.
- Peter Whapham (East Boldre Parish Council) raised concerns of access to the foreshore being denied by land owners.
- Professor Evans (Institute of Chartered Foresters) suggested that the consultation date for both documents should be extended until after the next Panel meeting to give time for more discussion after individual groups had consulted with their members and to formulate a Panel view on the documents. However, members subsequently agreed that this approach would not be practical due to the diverse range of bodies represented on the Panel and individual organisations were encouraged to submit their responses before the deadline.
- Barry Olorenshaw (New Forest Business Partnership) commented that care needed to be taken not to put too much emphasis on recreational horse keeping as there was a lot more to the Plan than that. He felt it was deficient in its regard for the local economy.
- Cllr. Bennison (Bramshaw PC) confirmed that she had raised the issue of pony paddocks with the panel previously and felt that the recreational horse keeping policy was a tool for planners and enforcement officers to take action against a minority of people who spoil the landscape.

Recommendations:

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