

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 24 APRIL 2007

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

Summary

Another busy four weeks with substantial input from members on a number of fronts.

Recommendation

To note the report.

Resources

Routine

Paper

NFNPA 177/07: Cover paper

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1. This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 28 March for all work except Planning Development Control and Enforcement which covers activity in March and the full end-year position. Another busy four weeks with substantial input from members on a number of fronts.

Members

2. Some members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events:
 - Informal session to discuss the working structure of the Management Plan, following the Authority meeting on 28 March
 - Meeting with New Forest Association, 29 March
 - Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association, 30 March
 - Environmental Design Training, 30 March
 - Boundary markers and signage advisory group meeting, 30 March
 - Tour for members of the Planning Development Control Committee, 2 April
 - Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 3 April
 - Interpretation and Education strategies meeting, 4 April
 - Joint Core Strategy working group meeting, 13 April
 - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 17 April
 - Hampshire and Isle of Wight Improvement Board, 20 April
3. Forthcoming activities include:
 - ANPA conference on Climate Change, 25-27 April
 - Meeting of the New Forest Consultative Panel, 10 May
 - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 15 May
 - Joint Core Strategy meeting, 24 May
 - Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association meeting, 8 June
 - Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 12 June
 - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 19 June
 - Second purpose workshop (yet to be scheduled)

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

First Purpose

Conservation and Enhancement

4. Partnership Working

- Staff met representatives from SEEDA and New Forest District Council to discuss opportunities for a future LEADER bid for the New Forest. Emma Rigglesworth gave a presentation on lessons learnt from the current programme to a Hampshire County Council conference. Further workshops will be organised over the next few months to firm up a future bid with the New Forest Local Action Group and key stakeholders.
- Kathryn Boler has assisted the Forestry Commission with the submission of an application to the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund for a heathland / mire restoration project in Ringwood Forest. She also attended a workshop on legacy fundraising to assess the potential benefits of working with partner organisations on a long term legacy fundraising campaign, aimed at securing land for back-up grazing and properties providing housing for commoners.

5. Corporate Plan

Commoning and farming; Nature conservation (C1/C3)

- A Project Development officer will join the Authority on 30 April 2007 to co-ordinate the development of the bid on behalf of the New Forest to the Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnerships Programme.
- An application to fund an incinerator for the local hunt to use for the disposal of fallen stock was submitted to the Authority's LEADER+ Small Grants Scheme and is awaiting approval.
- The Commoning Review Steering Group met to receive updates from the four topic groups. The topic groups are due to submit their preliminary reports to the Steering Group by 1 May 2007.
- Ian Barker has been working on developing an assessment matrix to test the Local Development Framework Core Strategy against the requirements of the Habitats Regulations.

Landscape conservation (C2)

- Sarah Kelly attended a Hampshire County Council seminar on de-cluttering signs on roads, removing road markings and repaving village and town centres. This provided some very useful input into the existing

sign de-cluttering project. Sarah has also provided advice on traffic calming in Burley.

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Sustainable Development (C4/SE1/SE2/SE3)

- Work has continued on developing three new projects ready for submission to the Sustainable Development Fund Panel in April. Claire Gingell has been working with Honeypot House and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust to develop their projects. Staff have been involved in the continuing support and monitoring of 19 existing projects.
- A number of staff have been involved in the Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Core Strategy.
- Work is continuing with New Forest District Council to develop a range of workshops aimed at encouraging businesses to minimise their environmental impacts.
- Work is continuing on the development of a possible SEEDA funded project to trial the development of a design for a commoner's cottage which utilises local timber and meets high sustainability standards. If successful it is hoped that the approach can be shared across the South East region.

Conservation of cultural heritage (C6)

- Frank Green has visited Foxbury Plantation with Anthony Pasmore in advance of felling to see the archaeological sites that have been located by the New Forest Section of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society. The location of ephemeral upstanding landscape archaeological features and 'boiling mounds' requires very distinctive local knowledge and skills.
- The specification for archaeological work along the route of the Gas pipeline from Lockerley to Marchwood through the Park has been agreed in conjunction with Siemen's archaeological contractors the Oxford Archaeological Unit and with the archaeologist from Hampshire County Council. The archaeological work will be monitored.
- Work has progressed on producing a specification for agreement with principal stakeholders and the voluntary sector to guide preparation of a formal Heritage Lottery Fund application later in the year for a maritime and intertidal archaeological project. Work has involved colleagues from the Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology and the Coastal Projects Officer at NFDC.
- Frank Green attended the Institute of Field Archaeologists Annual Conference in Reading, made useful contacts with archaeological colleagues in other National Parks, and attended sessions on National Strategies for ships and boat remains; landscapes and the setting of

cultural heritage features; the ethics and values of heritage. The National Historic Seascapes Project includes a pilot study area, funded by English Heritage, covering the Solent and waters off the Isle of Wight.

Second Purpose

Understanding and Enjoyment

6. Partnership working

- Staff now officially represent the Authority on the New Forest Tourism Association's newly constituted Steering Group (which combines its former Management and Marketing Committees), while continuing to make links with local organisations, including an introductory visit to ArtSway.

7. Corporate Plan

- **Recreation and Visitor Management (U1):** Tenders have now been received and are being evaluated for providing assistance with the preparation of the Recreation Management Strategy (and National Park Management Plan consultations).
- **Traffic and Transport (U2):** Working with Hampshire County Council and New Forest District Council, a Coach Drivers' Handbook has been published and an official guide and other arrangements finalised for this year's New Forest Tour service which begins again in May.

Understanding and awareness (U3)

- Initial designs for Boundary Markers have been considered by the Advisory Group and revised proposals are being drawn up for the Authority meeting in June.
- Following the Authority's approval of the proposed terms for an association with the New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust, on the operation of the New Forest Centre in Lyndhurst, the Trustees voted unanimously in favour of the proposal. The legal agreement is being finalised, both parties have worked on progressing the appointment of a Centre Manager and the practicalities of re-branding, new displays and so on are being progressed.
- A member workshop was held to help finalise the Interpretation Strategy which will be amended and brought to the Authority meeting in June.
- Directorate staff helped to organise the 'spring clean' litter-pick with the Forestry Commission and New Forest District Council, which helped to raise awareness of litter as well as practically removing it.

- The Aren't Birds Brilliant webcam and associated displays at the Reptile Centre was launched just before Easter, working in partnership with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Forestry Commission.
- **Education (U4):** A member workshop was held to help finalise the Education Strategy which will be amended and brought to the next Authority meeting in June.
- The second meeting of the Educators' Forum was very well attended. Support and advice on the content for the preparation of a *Teachers' Guide to the New Forest* was given, together with valuable advice on developing a travel grant scheme which outdoor centres can use to target new user groups from inner city areas of Southampton and Bournemouth.
- **Countryside and Rights of Way Act and Access Forum (U7):** Consultants have been selected to research work into providing information about 'easy access' to the countryside.
- New Forest Access Forum members joined those of the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum to consider issues relating to coastal access at a meeting in Beaulieu. The Government's consultation paper on access to the coast is expected to be published in May.

8. Planning Policy

Corporate Plan

Partnership working (A3)

- The Core Strategy Joint Members' Panel met on 27 March and 13 April. These informal meetings considered potential spatial strategy options including broad areas for the location of new development and the approach to affordable housing, the local economy and green space provision.
- As part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy, work continues on the various assessments and appraisals required including the Sustainability Appraisal; the Appropriate Assessment to look at the impacts on protected habitats and species; a Transport Assessment; a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment to define areas at risk from flooding (taking into account climate change projections); and a study to explore the economic viability of potential approaches to affordable housing provision within the New Forest. This work is being done jointly with the Policy and Plans team at New Forest District Council.

Spatial planning policies (A4):

- Statements for the public examination into the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West were submitted in early March. The Authority's

- statements relate to the impacts of development on protected habitats; and the growth proposals for the Bournemouth-Poole-Christchurch area and their potential impacts on the special qualities of the New Forest National Park.
- Staff attended the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) Green Infrastructure workshop on 26 March. The workshop was the first step in the development of a Green Infrastructure Strategy for South Hampshire. The Authority considers the provision of new and enhanced green infrastructure within South Hampshire to be vital in the sustainable development of the sub-region and in relieving pressures on the protected habitats of the New Forest arising from development in adjacent areas.
 - The issues surrounding the principle of extending the submitted Core Strategy into the Wiltshire area of the National Park were explored at the public examination into the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Core Strategy on 29 March. The National Park Authority and Hampshire County Council met the Planning Inspector to discuss the concerns raised by the Government Offices for the South East and South West and Wiltshire County Council. The Inspector's binding Report is expected in summer 2007.
 - The full schedule of inherited planning policies that the Authority wishes to save beyond September 2007 were sent to the Government Office for the South East. This was a significant piece of work, as the National Park is currently covered by three Local Plans, three Minerals and Waste Local Plans and two Structure Plans. The aim of the exercise is to ensure that the Authority continues to have appropriate planning policy coverage until the Authority's own policies are in place in the future.

9. Development Control

During March the Development Control unit carried out the following work:

Planning applications: received 127. Applications continue to be registered within two to three working days following receipt. The Authority received 1330 planning applications in its first year.

Planning decisions: 90 issued, of which 78 were approved (86%) and 18 were refused (14%). Three applications were withdrawn. Nine (10%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 20 March.

85% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 89% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

During 2006/07 a total of 1330 applications were received and 1157 decisions issued of which 827 (71%) were approved and 339 (29%) were refused. A

further 62 applications were withdrawn by applicants. In terms of performance on application targets, this improved as the year progressed, with both householder and minor application targets being met in the 4th quarter. For the year as a whole, 73% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks; 60% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks and 40% of major applications were determined within thirteen weeks (the target for major applications is 60%).

There were 74 appeals against the Authority's own decisions and so far 28 of those appeals have been decided, of which 8 (28%) were allowed.

Live planning applications: 341 at 28 February, compared with 290 at 28 February.

Appeals: Six new appeals received this month. Of the 9 appeal decisions in March, only one was allowed, and two 'split' decisions, allowing the appeal in part. For the year end, a reasonable performance on defending decisions on appeal, with 72% of all appeals being dismissed.

Enforcement: 55 new enforcement cases were registered in March and 36 cases were closed. There are currently some 300+ outstanding enforcement cases.

10. Environmental Design

- A normal reactive service continues to be provided in respect of general enquiries and planning, listed building consent and tree work applications, providing advice on trees and listed buildings and building design.
- The team was consulted by Development Control on 33 applications during March. 17 consultations were returned within the 14 day target, the rest are still live. **(Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7)**
- **18** tree work applications were registered during March and **40** determined. During March **98%** were determined within the 8 week target date. **2%** (2 decisions) were outside the target date due to negotiations with the applicants or other interested parties.
- **6** new Tree Preservation Orders were made in March, which are made in the interests of amenity and expediency as required.
- The Authority's web site tree information area has been launched and is available for public view and use. Features include application and information documents that can be downloaded as well as useful links to other tree related web sites and a 'tree of the month' feature.
- Work is continuing on design guidance for new agricultural buildings. **(Corporate Plan Objective C7)**

- Staff are continuing to put together a framework for a Conservation Area Management Plan which will cover all conservation areas in the Park and at the same time are looking at the extent of existing conservation areas. **(Corporate Plan Objective C7)**

Corporate Functions

11. Communications

Corporate Plan

- Design work started on the third edition of the Authority's newsletter, *Park Life*, for publication in late April. **(A1, U3)**
- Work started on developing the theme and finding materials for this year's New Forest Show stand. **(U3)**
- Work continued on the short introductory film about the National Park for use in presentations, talks and on the website. **(U3, U4)**
- The website was improved with new material about trees in the Planning section, weather in the Visiting section, and sounds of the Forest in the Living In section plus many daily updates. **(A1, U3)**
- Communications continued to work closely with colleagues in the Understanding and Enjoyment Directorate to help progress plans for National Park boundary markers. **(U3)**
- New photographs were added to the National Park Photographic Library **(A1, U3)**

Partnership working

- The joint 'spring clean' litter awareness initiative with the Forestry Commission and New Forest District Council was held in March with a week of events and extensive press coverage. **(C2)**

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)**

12. Member Services

- Member Services have been involved in facilitating preparations for Authority and committee meetings, providing committee and member support and following up on actions arising from the meetings.
- Other work undertaken by the Section included monitoring complaints received by the Authority, revising the members' training programme, reviewing interim committee arrangements following the local government elections, reviewing the results of public and member surveys and actions arising from points made by public and members, and preparing various facilitating reports to committees.

- Member Services also assisted in organising environmental design training for members on 30 March and a planning tour which took place on 2 April.

Corporate Services

13. Human Resources

- The first staff survey for the Authority was distributed individually to all staff on Wednesday 4 April for completion and return by 20 April 2007. Once the results have been analysed an action plan will be developed and shared with staff so the Authority's progress can be monitored over the next year and fed back to staff.
- An Occupational Health provider should be in place by the end of May 2007.
- The Authority held its first Disability Equality Scheme Group meeting on 26 March with external organisations. The group is initially concentrating activity on publishing the Authority's Disability Equality Scheme in September 2007. Further meetings for the group are being arranged for May and July.
- The final Equality and Diversity Training sessions were held on 6 March for Managers and 8 March for staff. This training is now complete for all staff.
- Libby Holmes will join us from the Forestry Commission at the end of April as the Project Development Officer - New Forest: Life in Common.
- Building Conservation Officer, Martin Poole, left the Authority on 13 April to pursue a new career in the south west and a replacement if being recruited.
- Celia Barker has retired from the Authority and the part-time Communications Assistant post is under recruitment. We wish both Martin and Celia well with their future plans and are grateful for the help they gave us in our first fully operational year.

14. ICT

- ICT Services have been consulting with the Authority's Eriksson telephone system provider on how statistics may be gathered on telephone usage within the Authority and their support package is being looked at by the Director Corporate Services.
- The Trees and Tree Work Applications web modules are in their final round of the approval process. After all agreed changes have been checked this new addition to our web site will be made available to the public during April.

- In view of the e-mail problems recently faced by NFDC, ICT's Systems Support Officer and ICT Manager have completed training on the corporate Microsoft Exchange Server and will be carrying out a test restore of this system in the next four weeks.
- Recent work has been focussed on completing the internet GIS. The system has now been 'handed over' to New Forest National Park Authority by its supplier Cadcorp, and GIS Officer Andrew Bell will soon make it available to those visiting New Forest National Park Authority's web site.

15. Finance and Performance

- The Authority is now committed to a budget of £4.8 million for 2007/08, partly funded from Defra's grant, partly from draw-down from our reserves and other income streams.
- The £4.8 million compares with our planned spend at the beginning of last year of £4.6 million, and our out-turn of around £3.1 million. Starting the year fully-staffed will make a big difference to our expenditure levels this year, and the focus will now shift to getting best value for money for the Park from both our people resource and from our programme spend.
- The Smith & Williamson team reported progress on their study of the Authority's funding to the Senior Management Team on 28 March. Their final report should be available before the end of April, for presentation to members, and Defra in May. The agreed results will then be discussed with Defra in advance of its decisions on funds following its 2007 Spending Review settlement.

Recommendation

To note the report.