

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 24 APRIL 2007

DEVELOPING THE BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN FOR THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK

Report by: Ian Barker, Ecologist, Conservation and Enhancement

Summary:

This paper outlines the process and timetable proposed for developing a local Biodiversity Action Plan for the New Forest National Park.

Recommendation:

To note and approve the proposed timetable, preparation process, partnerships and vision for the Plan.

Resources and Corporate Plan:

The plan process will be coordinated by the New Forest National Park's ecologist with input from other staff within the Authority. Financial resources to facilitate preparation workshops, consultation and report production have been allocated within existing budgets.

Corporate Plan objective C3: Conserve and enhance the nature conservation value of the New Forest National Park.

Papers:

NFNPA 182/07

Cover paper 182/07

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Summary

This paper outlines the process and timetable proposed for developing a local Biodiversity Action Plan for the New Forest.

1 Background

- 1.1 Biodiversity is an abbreviation of biological diversity and is commonly used to describe the richness and variety of life. The term not only encompasses the number of species and the variation amongst them, but also the interactions between species and their relationships within complex ecosystems.
- 1.2 The Government recognises that the continuing decline in biodiversity is one of the major issues facing the global community. The UK alone has lost more than 100 species in the last 100 years. Biodiversity helps to support human society, for example by acting as a source of medicines and crops, through alleviation of floods and coastal erosion and contributing to quality of life. Human contact with nature is considered essential for mental and physical well-being. Robust and functioning ecosystems rich in biodiversity are vital to mitigate climate change, habitats such as wetlands sequester a significant amount of carbon dioxide.
- 1.3 Biodiversity is not just a nature conservation issue. It helps to create thriving, sustainable communities by providing employment and generating revenue. Activities connected with the management of the natural environment support around 299,000 full time equivalent jobs in England, and contribute more than £7.5 billion in gross value added to the national economy¹. The employment it generates is greater than that supported by either the chemical or the motor manufacturing industry.

¹ *Revealing the value of the natural environment. Defra. 2004*

2 The Biodiversity Planning process in the UK

- 2.1 In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, known as the Rio Earth Summit, took place in order to consider the urgent problems facing the environment and the need for sustainable development. One of the major outcomes of this summit was the Convention on Biological Diversity. The UK was one of many signatories.
- 2.2 The UK Government adopted a Biodiversity Action Plan in 1996 and national plans for priority habitats and species were published in 1999. The plans prioritised nature conservation action and for the first time sought to set national targets for restoration of those habitats and species that had been lost or declined in the UK.
- 2.3 The UK Biodiversity Action Plan calls for the preparation of local Biodiversity Action Plans by local partnerships and recommends that local authorities take the lead in this process. It has been increasingly evident that local Biodiversity Action Plans are being viewed as a major delivery mechanism for the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. An update of the UK plan to form England's Biodiversity Action Plan in 2004 emphasises the links of biodiversity with areas of local governance and the expectation for joined up action, particularly with the planning system.
- 2.4 In most cases the primary purpose of local Biodiversity Action Plans is to focus resources by means of local partnerships to implement conservation action for the priority habitats and species and locally important wildlife and sites. The content of local Biodiversity Action Plans is informed and guided by the national targets for habitats and species so that their implementation is firmly linked to national priorities. However, the plans also seek to reflect the values of local people and provide a focus for local initiatives and are important elements of the Community Strategies being prepared by Local Strategic Partnerships to further the wellbeing of their local areas.

3 Biodiversity Action Plans locally

- 3.1 Several of the key habitats and species occurring in the New Forest were considered as part of the production of both the Hampshire Biodiversity Action Plan in 1998, and the Wiltshire plan in 2002. However due to the scale of these plans, local New Forest issues and drivers were not specifically addressed. The plans acknowledged the need for integration of new actions and development of strategic aims at a more specific local scale by means of a New Forest Biodiversity Action Plan. The Strategy for the New Forest (2003) contained a commitment to produce a local Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 3.2 The New Forest National Park Authority Corporate Plan takes on this commitment and Objective C3 includes a commitment to establish a plan

partnership of key stakeholders, and complete the Biodiversity Action Plan by 2008.

4 Update on progress

- 4.1 Since the appointment of the National Park Authority's ecologist post in late autumn 2006, officers have sought views from key organisations on their support for a local Biodiversity Action Plan to complement and take further the existing coverage of issues and actions relevant to the National Park.
- 4.2 Officers have also undertaken a review of approaches within other National Parks and local Biodiversity Action Plans, with particular reference to the effectiveness of strategies in delivering strategic actions and gaining corporate commitment for action from a range of partners.
- 4.3 A key issue has been investigation of the geographical coverage of the Biodiversity Action Plan to complement the planning strategies currently in production (Local Development Framework) in partnership with New Forest District Council. There is officer support from New Forest District Council for the Biodiversity Action Plan to include areas of the district as well as the National Park and it is hoped the District Council will adopt the Biodiversity Action Plan. The New Forest National Park Biodiversity Action Plan will also encompass those areas of Wiltshire and Hampshire within the Park boundary.
- 4.4 Influencing management of areas outside of the National Park is essential due to the cross boundary issues of biodiversity. Contacts have been made with adjacent local authorities and biodiversity partnerships, some of whom are currently reviewing or producing their own plans.
- 4.5 A project initiation document has been produced in line with the authority's project management system in consultation with the Director of Conservation and Enhancement.

5 Format of the Biodiversity Action Plan

- 5.1 It is expected that the Biodiversity Action Plan will develop a challenging and jointly owned strategic vision for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity which will be adopted by the Authority, the District Councils and key stakeholders. It will provide analysis of priorities for biodiversity conservation, spatial opportunities for enhancement and establish an action plan to deliver the necessary responses to the challenges facing biodiversity in the National Park and beyond.
- 5.2 The final format and coverage will be subject to views of the stakeholders and working group. At present officers recommend that the plan is grouped around strategic issues and themes which are drivers of ecological change and of particular relevance to the wildlife of the National Park. The plan will

then establish a long terms vision for each, and a small number of key targets and actions for shorter term action.

5.3 In order to address weaknesses perceived in other Biodiversity Action Plans, it is recommended that wherever possible the action plan is strategic and spatially based. The plan should seek to avoid duplication with the existing county Biodiversity Action Plans and bring added value to existing action.

5.4 The key drivers and themes currently recommended for coverage are:

- Climate change
- Coastal change
- Reducing habitat fragmentation
- Habitat and land management
- Enhancing biodiversity through the planning system
- Research, survey and biological information
- Raising awareness and engaging people.

6 Timetable

6.1 A timetable of key actions for the process is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Outline of key stages planned in the preparation of the New Forest Biodiversity Action Plan

Action	Timescale
Agree project initiation document with key partners and core working group	Spring 2007
Research and survey – analysis of current biodiversity resource, status, trends and issues	Summer 2007
Stakeholder consultation and consensus on issues and options for action (where possible this will utilise the Management Plan consultation workshops)	Autumn/winter 2007
Member consultation on issues and options	Autumn/winter 2007
Prepare plan	Winter 2007/ spring 2008
Approval from members for draft plan	Spring/summer 2008
Stakeholder and public consultation on draft plan	Summer 2008
Approval of final plan by members and adoption	Autumn 2008
Launch event	Autumn 2008/ spring 2009

7 Engaging with stakeholders and the public

- 7.1 Opportunities will be afforded for consultation and engagement with the plan production as shown in Table 1. Where possible opportunities will be taken to utilise relevant consultation workshops planned for the National Park Management Plan. These will enable results of the research and survey to be communicated and views obtained on issues and options for action.
- 7.2 The draft plan will be the subject of a final consultation period. Key stakeholders, wider partners and the public will be targeted for their views. Consultation surgeries will be held to enable discussion of views directly with officers.

8 Recommendation

To note and approve the proposed timetable, preparation process, partnerships and vision for the plan.