

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**AUTHORITY MEETING – 29 JANUARY 2009**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

**Report by:** Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

**Summary:**

This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 11 December 2008 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in December.

**Recommendation:**

**To note the report**

**Paper:**

**NFNPA 282/09:** Cover paper

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- 1 This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 11 December 2008 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in December.

**Members**

- 2 Some members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events:
  - North Solent Shoreline Management Plan Elected Members Group meeting, 12 December
  - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 16 December
  - Meeting with Sandra Gidley MP, 19 December
  - New Forest Consultative Panel, 8 January
  - Secretary of State member selection panel, 8 January
  - Planning Development Control Committee, 20 January.
- 3 Forthcoming activities include:
  - Tour of New Forest Centre, 16 February
  - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 17 February
  - Tree Preservation Order Objection Panel meeting, 17 February
  - Campaign for National Parks, Trustees meeting, 17 February

**DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS**

**Conservation, Recreation and Sustainable Development**

**4 Partnership working**

**Funding**

- Officers attended the Local Action Group meeting for the new LEADER programme to provide guidance on the five expressions of interest which were presented to its members, which was followed by a SEEDA training session on project appraisal. After much delay, SEEDA have now issued the New Forest LEADER contract for the 2008-2013 programme.

- The External Funding Officer completed and submitted an application to the Crown Estates' Marine Communities Fund for match funding for the maritime archaeology project.
- Officers organised and attended a meeting with the New Forest Livestock Society to discuss progress and issues relating to the Beaulieu Road Sales Yard development.
- The External Funding Officer provided assistance to a number of groups including the New Forest Trust in their development of the Commoners Oral History project and Lyndhurst Community Plan Group in their application for a Grassroots Grant.

## 5 Corporate Plan

### Landscape (C1)

- A joint site visit with Mott Gifford (consultants to Hampshire Highways) was undertaken to discuss the signage for the current 'Village 30' project (where villages can apply to change the existing 40 mph speed limit to a 30 mph). The aim of the site visit was to influence the number and location of the signs to reduce the impact wherever possible.
- A meeting was held with the Clerk of Ringwood Town Council to discuss the Town Council's desire to rebrand the signage to Ringwood as 'The Gateway to the New Forest National Park'. Officers agreed to work in closely with Ringwood Town Council who emphasised that they were at the start of the process and discussing lots of ideas. The issue will be raised at the next Boundary Marker and Signage Advisory Group.

### Nature Conservation (C3)

- In December, the Authority and Natural England held a seminar for local planning authorities and key stakeholders to raise awareness of issues for housing growth in the south-east and south-west regions. The event allowed us to present the results of the jointly funded research project by Footprint Ecology, current statutory advice from Natural England and investigate possible mitigation measure such as those adopted by the Dorset Heaths Interim Planning Framework. The seminar had a good coverage of attendance from authorities involved in the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset.
- The Authority's Ecologist reviewed information provided by the Lymington Harbour Commissioners, Natural England and the Marine and Fisheries Agency to complete the Authority's appropriate assessment of the proposal to develop breakwaters to

protect the harbour. Approval has now been given for the first stage of the proposal under the Habitat Regulations.

### **Building Conservation and Design (C7)**

- A normal reactive service continues to be provided in respect of general enquiries, planning and listed building consent applications, historic buildings and building design.
- The team received 26 consultations from Development Control, 16 consultations were returned within the 21 day target. There are seven still live, in time. **(Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7)**
- The review of conservation areas in the National Park is continuing. The review is assessing the boundaries of the existing conservation areas inherited by the National Park Authority and producing character appraisals for these areas. The conservation areas of Burley and Fritham have been reviewed and proposals and appraisals were subject to consultation, closing 9 January. The conservation areas of Brockenhurst and Sway and Keyhaven and Ashlett have been reviewed and details of proposed boundary changes are currently out for consultation. The conclusion of the review of Beaulieu, Bucklers Hard and Exbury conservation areas is a separate Agenda item.
- Work has started on the first conservation area specific management plan which will be for the Western Escarpment conservation area.
- Work is continuing on the preparation of a draft Building Design Guide, for consultation in 2009. **(Corporate Plan Objective A4).**
- The Authority was represented by officers and Alan Rice at the annual meeting of Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust when progress on building conservation work throughout the year was reported.

### **Traffic, transport and tourism (U2)**

- The Director of Strategy and Planning attended a recent meeting of the Cross Boundary Transport Liaison group at which members and officers from Hampshire County Council, Dorset County Council and Wiltshire discuss transport issues of mutual concern.
- Discussions have been held with Hampshire County Council about future liaison arrangements on transport and traffic issues following their decision not to fund the New Forest Transport Officer post beyond March 2009.

## **Recreation management and access (U6)**

- The consultation responses on the draft Recreation Management Strategy are being analysed and the process of drawing up options for revisions and improvements is being planned. **(U1)**
- Officers have been liaising with Defra and the English National Park Authorities' Association over potential amendments to the Marine and Coastal Access Bill which is currently passing through Parliament.

## **Sustainable development (SE1)**

The Sustainable Development Fund Panel has recently approved funding for the following projects:

### *Ferry Crofts Sustainability Improvements*

This project is to install a ground source heat pump and a rainwater harvesting system at Ferry Crofts Scout Centre. The building will also be more effectively insulated and energy efficient lighting will be fitted.

### *Roots Youth Theatre Festival*

This application is to hold a youth theatre festival in Blackwater Arboretum. Taking place over several days in the summer the festival will celebrate the cultural past and environmental future of the New Forest. The festival will include hard-hitting performances on climate change and litter.

### *Tile Barn Wood Fuel Boiler*

This is to part-fund the installation of a large wood fuel boiler system at Tile Barn Outdoor Centre. The installation of the system will save over 16 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions a year.

### *Priestlands Sustainable School Project*

This application is to implement many aspects of the Priestlands School Eco Action Plan. It includes a comprehensive range of measures that will make Priestlands an exemplar sustainable school and includes sharing this practice with other local and national schools. For example, the development of an eco-classroom in the walled garden, installation of smart metering throughout the school, increase in production of the school's own food, massive reduction of paper consumption, introduction of free-cycling, implementation of energy saving measures and changes in procurement methods.

### *Provision of compost toilet at All Saints Church, Minstead*

This is to install an environmentally-friendly waterless compost toilet at All Saints Church, Minstead rather than a traditional facility.

### *New Forest Invasive Non-Native Plants Project*

Invasive non-native plant species are a great threat to the unique biodiversity and habitats of the New Forest National Park. This project aims to tackle the problem of aquatic non-natives through an extensive combination of surveying, mapping, publicity, education and plant removal.

## **Information and Visitor Services**

### **6 Corporate Plan**

- Negotiations for trunk road boundary signs (for the A36, A31 and M27) continue. **(U3)**
- A 2009 events booklet has been printed; this describes National Park Authority-led events, partnership events with which the Authority is involved and other organisations which provide public events. **(U3)**
- The employment of a ranger to lead on the use of the mobile information and interpretation unit (the National Park Explorer) from March/April 2009 has been confirmed. During 2008 the Unit and Ranger provided the Authority with an excellent 'platform' from which to engage with local people and visitors. **(U3)**
- Sets of 16 education factsheets were sent to about 80 local schools. **(U4)**
- The National Park's special qualities are promoted in this year's official tourism publications produced by New Forest District Council **(A1, U3)**
- Improvements to the look, feel and content of the website continue on a regular basis. **(A1)**
- A 'forest trumps' game for the Funzone on the website is being developed. This will highlight the special qualities of various iconic New Forest animals, buildings, sites etc. **(U4)**
- Work has started to plan the Authority's presence at the New Forest Show in 2009, including agreement to share ideas about emerging themes with New Forest District Council and the Forestry Commission **(A1, U3)**

## 7 Partnership working

- Officers wait to hear from Hampshire Highways officers about progressing the pilot sign rationalisation programme on the B3054 Lymington to Dibden Purlieu road. This will include new animal accidents warning signs **(U3)**
- Officers' assistance at Drifts is complete for the year and a report recommending involvement next year is being prepared. **(U5)**
- Following the successful training in 2008, plans are in hand for joint training of seasonal rangers and volunteers from delivery organisations within the Park in March 2009. **(U5)**
- The pilot Coastal Ranger post (joint with Hampshire County Council) played a fundamental role in engaging with local people and visitors along the coastline of the National Park during 2008 and the contract will be extended to nine months for the summer of 2009. **(U5)**
- A report on progress with the Agreement with the Ninth Centenary Trust at the New Forest Centre, including an assessment of value for money, went to the December meeting of the Resources and Performance Committee as requested by members. A visit to the Centre for members is arranged for 16 February. **(U3)**
- A joint action plan to reduce the feeding of ponies has been prepared. Actions include site-specific measures such as a poster campaigns in Lyndhurst and general educational initiatives (such as offering New Forest schools assemblies and workshops. **(U3)**
- Plans are in hand to repeat the joint RSPB, Forestry Commission, Carnyx Films and National Park 'Aren't Birds Brilliant! *in the New Forest*' project in 2009. Developments should include higher quality images, and more use of the awning. **(U3)**
- Plans for the 2009 Spring Clean are in hand with New Forest District Council and the Forestry Commission, including new work with schools. Officers hope to work with the District Council to install more Forest-friendly and pony-proof litter bins in Forest villages. **(U3)**
- Work is under way for the spring edition of *New Forest Today* magazine published jointly with New Forest District Council and the Forestry Commission and work is near completion for the 2009 edition of *Forest Focus* jointly with the Forestry Commission. **(A1, U3)**
- Work to support a funding bid to SEEDA for a sustainable tourism project is progressing. If successful the project will promote sustainable tourism across nine South East Protected Landscapes, linked to the special qualities of each. The bid has the support of New Forest District Council Tourism Service and the New Forest Tourism Association. **(SE1)**

## 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)**
- Work continued to investigate income generation ideas under the guidance of a working group including members from the Resources and Performance Committee. **(A1)**

## Planning Policy

### 9 Corporate Plan

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

- Work on the initial analysis of the 9,724 responses to the consultation draft National Park Plan continued through December. The Authority has now written to all respondents setting out the initial analysis of the comments received and explaining how the draft document will be taken forward in the next few months. All of the responses were made available for inspection by the public at South Efford House from Monday 19 January.
- To take the Plan forward, the Authority will be organising a number of working groups covering some of the key issues in the Plan, including socio-economic policies; housing; 'service' villages; zoning; traffic and transport; and recreational horse keeping. A range of interest groups will be invited to participate in the workshops.
- Linked to the preparation of the National Park Plan, the Statutory Body Liaison Group met at South Efford House on 19 December. Representatives from Hampshire County Council, Test Valley Borough Council, Wiltshire County Council, New Forest District Council and the Forestry Commission attended to discuss the draft National Park Plan and the responses from the statutory consultees.
- The team have also been discussing with staff and councillors from New Forest District Council their comments on the draft National Park Plan. A Joint members' Advisory Group meeting was held at Appletree Court on 9 December where the Authority's draft response to the District Council's Core Strategy Submission Document was also discussed.

## 10 Other work

- The team was represented at the workshop held in Lyndhurst on 2 December to discuss the requirements of the Habitats Regulations Assessments, with a particular focus on the protected habitats within the New Forest National Park.
- The Annual Monitoring Report was submitted to the Government Office for the South East by the end of December 2008 deadline. The Report looks at the preparation of planning policy documents and the implementation of existing planning policies. The report is a separate Agenda item.
- The team also responded to a number of important consultations during December 2008:
  - i) The New Forest District Core Strategy Submission Document. The Authority's response, approved by members at the 11 December Authority meeting, raises significant concerns at the level of development proposed above the South East Plan housing requirement for the District, and the potential impacts on the National Park. The Council's proposed affordable housing policies are supported;
  - ii) The Test Valley Borough Council Core Strategy Submission Document, which sets out the strategic planning framework for the Borough for the next twenty years. The Authority's response supported the proposal for a new country park in Southern Test Valley; and
  - iii) The Wiltshire Minerals Core Strategy and the Wiltshire Waste Development Control Policies Development Plan Documents.

## 11 Development Control

### Development Control

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

**Planning applications: received 80.** Applications were registered within three working days following receipt.

**Planning decisions: 78 issued**, of which 61 were approved (78%) and 17 were refused (22%). Four applications were withdrawn. Seven (9%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 16 December 2008.

79% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 72% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

**Live planning applications: 302 at 31 December**, compared with 304 at 30 November.

**Appeals: Ten new appeals** received this month. There were six appeal decisions in December, all of which were dismissed.

**Enforcement: 38 new enforcement cases** were registered in December and 38 cases were closed. There were 281 outstanding enforcement cases at the end of the month. Six Enforcement Notices were served during December.

The tree team was consulted by Development Control on 13 applications during December, 10 of which were returned within the 21 day target.  
**(Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7)**

Thirty six tree work applications were registered during December and 43 determined, 100% of which within the eight week target date. No Tree Preservation Orders were made.

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. A pilot survey which was planned for commencement in December has been delayed but is now being organised for January 2009. This will cover a limited number of sites using volunteer rangers co-ordinated by the Forestry Commission. The data gathered will be submitted to the Ancient Tree Hunt and distributed as required to other key stakeholders.

## 12 Member Services

- The Member Services section has been involved in providing support to the current Authority meeting and meetings of the Standards Committee and Resources and Performance Committee, and followed up on actions arising from these meetings. The Section has also assisted the Monitoring Officer in drafting several Committee and Authority reports and provided administrative assistance to the New Forest Consultative Panel meeting on 8 January 2009.
- As an action following the last Authority meeting, the team updated the members' document folder with the latest version of the Authority's local protocols - copies have been distributed to all members and relevant officers.
- The section has been involved in monitoring complaints and requests received under Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation and the Environmental Information

Regulations, and has updated the Authority's Publication Scheme to adopt the model scheme set by the Information Commissioner. The team also facilitated the final tranche of responses to EIR requests received in respect of the National Park Plan and Recreation Management Strategy.

- The team has provided assistance to the New Forest Association of Local Councils towards filling the Secretary of State (Parish) vacancy on the Authority and, to this end, has facilitated a meeting between representatives of the Association and officers of the Authority. It is expected that this vacancy will be filled by April 2009.
- Members of the team have recently undergone training in Freedom of Information, Data Protection and the Environmental Information Regulations and attended a minute taking training course.

## **Corporate Services**

### **13 Human resources**

As of 31 December 2008 there are 68 members of staff or 61.47 full time equivalents, of whom 14 are part time and six are on a fixed term contract.

- John Clements, Head of Policy and Plans left the Authority on 12 December. We wish him success for the future.
- Leanne Atkinson, Coastal Ranger, a part-funded post with Hampshire County Council, reached the end of her contract on 21 December. We are grateful for her excellent work in piloting the new post and wish her well for the future.
- Richard Reeves joined the Authority on 1 December on a short term contract as the Historic Rural Settlement Project Officer.
- Cathie Turner-Jones returned from maternity leave on 10 December. The Human Resources and Training Manager post is now shared between Cathie and Sue Castleton.
- Laura Harry joined the Authority on 12 January 2009 as a Planning Officer in Development Control.
- Gillian Catchpole joined the Authority on 12 January 2009 to provide maternity cover for the Receptionist post.
- Recruitment is in train for a Monitoring and Enforcement Officer in Development Control, the Head of Policy and Plans, a Head of Performance and Administration and a Head of Communications.

#### 14 **ICT**

- The document management pilot project (to determine the suitability of Microsoft SharePoint as a solution for the Authority) continues, and a progress report will be presented to Management Board in February. **(A1)**
- Testing and further development of the Contact Management System continues, with data from the existing corporate Access database being migrated into the new system **(A1)**

#### 15 **Finance and performance**

- Work in the last month has involved all Directorates and Units in the assessment of the end 2008/09 budget forecast and preparation of the 2009/10 budget, consistently with the guidelines set by the Resources and Performance Committee on 4 December and approved by the Authority on 11 December 2008.
- Work on the preparation of the 2009/10 Corporate Plan has been held up by delays in the recruitment to the Head of Performance and Administration vacancy.

#### **Recommendation**

**To note the report.**