

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 24 JANUARY 2008

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 6 December 2007 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in November and December.

Recommendation:

To note the report.

Resources:

Routine

Paper:

NFNPA 226/08: Cover paper

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NFNPA 226/08

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- 1 This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 6 December 2007 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in November and December.

Members

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

- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 10 December
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 18 December
- Development Control policy review session, 18 December
- Consultative Panel meeting, 3 January
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 15 January
- Natural England briefing session, 15 January

- 3 Forthcoming activities include:

- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association meeting, 25 January
- 'New Forest, New Chapter' – Understanding and Enjoyment Topic Group, 28 January
- Seminar for Hampshire highways staff, 29 January
- 'New Forest, New Chapter' – Living and Working Topic Group, 30 January
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 31 January
- 'New Forest, New Chapter' – Conservation and Enhancement Topic Group, 4 February
- Recreation Management Strategy Members' Advisory Group meeting, early February (date to be confirmed)
- Core Strategy Joint Member Advisory Group meeting, 11 February
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 19 February
- Standards Committee meeting, 25 February
- Management Plan/Core Strategy Project Assurance Group, (date to be confirmed)

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

Conservation, Recreation and Sustainable Development

4 Partnership working

Funding

LEADER

- Staff helped to organise and attend a Local Action Group meeting to update its members on progress with the submission for the new LEADER programme.
- We have received generally positive feedback from SEEDA on the draft proposals for the New Forest LEADER programme, although there are some areas for further work and discussion. A draft of the LEADER proposal has now been circulated to staff and to all of the Local Action Group members for comments in advance of final submission on the 31 January. Letters of support are being requested from key organisations and individuals, to support the bid.
- The National Park's Funding Bulletin for community groups has been updated and circulated to partner organisations around the New Forest.

Life in Common (Heritage Lottery Fund Bid)

- The Life in Common Project Board was very disappointed to learn in mid-January that the Committee of the Commoners' Defence Association had decided to withdraw from the New Forest Landscape Partnership.
- Following discussion, the Board agreed that without the support of the commoners a landscape partnership bid would not be the appropriate mechanism for funding many of the projects proposed under the scheme.
- The hard work of partners and stakeholders has, however, not been wasted. A series of exciting projects has already been developed through the bid development process and it was agreed by the Board that the Authority should now work to repackage these ideas and identify other alternative sources of funding, wherever possible, to make them a reality. It is likely, however, that full implementation of the Commoning Review will not now be possible because the Life in Common bid was the main source of funding for the work.

5 Corporate Plan

Nature conservation (C3)

- Authority staff attended a meeting with Lymington Harbour Commissioners to discuss the Environmental Impact Assessment for proposals to create breakwater structures to protect the harbour. We have also reviewed the Environmental Impact Assessment and collated comments on the technical content of the Environmental Statement. The regulatory aspects of the project are complicated and challenging, and advice from Natural England is key. An application is expected in late January / February, supported by the Environmental Statement and will require consent from the Marine Fisheries Agency, Environment Agency and the National Park Authority.

Conservation of cultural heritage (C6)

- Further site visits have been made to assess the conservation and archaeological needs of built structures on Forestry Commission land as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund 'Life In Common' bid. The structures have all been photographed to provide a base line record and this has allowed staff to develop specifications for repair work.
- Two Farm Environment Plan historic environment data requests were completed for archaeology and landscape data by the team in December. These requests were prepared in the new nationally agreed format designed to be electronically downloaded by Farm Environment Plan Advisors.
- Access to the Landmark Historic Ordnance Survey mapping, now on the GIS, has allowed faster data collection prior to making site visits. The acquisition of scanned versions of the Boldre and Lymington Tithe Maps from the County Record Office has also assisted this process and demonstrated the value of quick access to historic map information. Richard Reeves and Peter Roberts have completed an assessment of the Tithe maps and Enclosure Award maps and accompanying schedules for the area of the National Park, held by the County Record Office and The National Archive. It will now be possible to assess the costs of acquiring these maps in digital form and ultimately having them geo-referenced (to match current Ordnance Survey base maps) so that they can also be made available on the GIS and also to community groups.
- The Archaeological woodland survey work on the Cadland Estate that we commissioned from Berkshire Archaeological Services

started in December and is due to be completed by the end of March. Similarly the woodland survey work on Forestry Commission land that we also commissioned has started and is being led by Anthony Pasmore at Oakley Plantation. This is the first stage of what we hope will be a much larger field survey project.

Traffic and transport (U2)

- Authority staff attended the Highways Agency Regional Road Users and Environmental Committee in Dorking on 3 December. This meeting gave the Highways Agency the opportunity to update stakeholders on network performance and other initiatives.
- Staff also attended the South West Hampshire Local Development Framework Transport Planning Group. This group looks at sharing best practice regarding transport elements and implications from the emerging Local Development Frameworks.

Access (U6)

- The December meeting of the New Forest Access Forum was held at a new location – Foxlease in Lyndhurst which proved to be a very successful venue. A separate paper describes the issues discussed at the meeting.

Sustainable development (SE1)

- Next year's funding for the Sustainable Development Fund from Defra has now been confirmed.
- Several meetings have been held to discuss potential Sustainable Development Fund projects including a number of initiatives that may contribute to the New Forest becoming a 'plastic bag free' national park. Four new projects have recently received grants from the Fund, totalling approximately £20,000. The projects in this round of funding are aimed at maintaining and improving the Park's special qualities.
 - The Forestry Commission will be undertaking an investigation into the possibilities for making their toilets in the New Forest sustainable. The study will explore a range of options to minimise the impacts of the toilets by reducing water use and waste production and preventing anti-social behaviour.
 - Hale Parish Council has been awarded funding to improve Hatchett Green, a Sight of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The current 'urban' style bollards and signs will be removed and replaced with signage and an interpretation board in keeping with the Forest landscape.

- Beaulieu Estate will be replacing its existing run-down village bus shelter with one matching Beaulieu's historical character. It will look over Mill Pond (an SSSI) and Palace House and provide information and a viewpoint.
- New Forest District Council has received funding to organise two 'meet the producer' events and manage a wood and craft fair in partnership with the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. Their aim is to promote and support local produce in the National Park.

Affordable Rural Housing (SE2)

- The Commoners Dwelling Scheme Panel met in December and approved an application from a commoner wishing to build dwellings under this scheme.

Information and Visitor Services

6 Corporate Plan

- An order has been placed for table-top dispensers to allow the animal emergency hotlines card, which has proved very popular, to be displayed and distributed more widely. **(A1, U3)**
- Work continued to produce DVD copies of the short introductory film about the National Park, *A Special Place*, for wider distribution. **(A1, U3, U4)**
- The text has been finalised for the remaining 12 education factsheets which will be published later in the financial year. **(U4)**
- The updated 2008 edition of the National Park *Pocket Guide* has been published and is being distributed. **(A1, U3)**
- More boundary markers were installed to complete the first batch. The aim is to complete the bulk of the programme, including signs on the A31 and M27, within this financial year. **(U3)**
- Work continued to plan and publicise next year's National Park events programme of walks and talks in conjunction with partners. **(U3)**
- Research and development continued on projects in the next phase of the Interpretation Strategy including a mobile display unit, standard exhibition, village information points and innovative walks leaflets. We have prepared a brief and invited several interpretative design companies to bid for the work to design the mobile unit. **(U3)**

- Initial work to involve young people in consultation about the Management Plan has started through contact with schools and a local theatre group. **(U4)**

7 Partnership working

- Joint work is near completion with the Forestry Commission to feature the National Park extensively in the 2008 edition of its visitor and resident newspaper *Forest Focus* **(A1, C2, U3)**
- Agisters started to use the portable temporary signs provided by the National Park Authority to inform motorists that an animal casualty occurred at that location in the last week. **(U3)**
- Work progressed on detailed design and planning work with the New Forest Centre for re-branding the exterior and updating displays inside as part of the partnership arrangements between the Ninth Centenary Trust and the National Park Authority. **(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)**
- December was a busy month for media enquiries, with significant interest in stories relating to Bournemouth Airport expansion, the planning application for South Efford House and relations with New Forest District Council over Local Development Framework Core Strategies. **(A1)**

Planning Policy

9 Corporate Plan

Corporate Plan Objective A3: Management Plan

- The write up and analysis of the series of workshops held in November continued through December. The workshops allowed a wide range of participants to explore the objectives and the early development of policy approaches for the Management Plan, Recreation Management Strategy and Local Development Framework Core Strategy. The second series of workshops is timetabled for late January and early February and will focus on the more detailed development of policies.

Corporate Plan Objective A4: Spatial Planning Policies

- The Joint Members' Advisory Group (made up of members from the National Park Authority and New Forest District Council) met on 29 November 2007 to discuss the Authority's consideration of

the District Council's Core Strategy Preferred Options document, and the programme for the development of the Authority's Core Strategy. Further meetings have been timetabled for the new year to inform the development of the two Core Strategies.

- Staff attended the Planning Policy Statement 25 (Development and Flood Risk, 2007) roll out presentation by the Environment Agency. This included the requirement for a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (which the Authority has developed in partnership with New Forest District Council).
- A meeting was held with Hampshire County Council, Natural England, the Forestry Commission, the Environment Agency and others to discuss the development of a Restoration Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), to expand on the guidance on restoration in the adopted Minerals and Waste Core Strategy. This restoration guidance is potentially important to the Authority, with minerals and waste sites around the edge of the National Park providing potential back up grazing land or off-Forest recreational areas once their operations are complete.
- Policy and Plans staff met members and other officers to discuss the existing development control policies inherited by the Authority, and the direction members wished the new policies to take. This will be carried forward over future months.

Corporate Plan Objective A6: Section 62 responsibilities

- Staff met senior officers from Christchurch Borough Council to discuss the Authority's decision to apply for a judicial review of the Council's decision to approve the expansion of terminal facilities at Bournemouth Airport. The Authority believes the Council failed to take proper account of the impact of the development on the National Park (as required by Section 62(2) of the Environment Act 1995). Christchurch Borough Council has been invited to participate in the further work the Authority is undertaking on noise impacts.

10 Other work

- Staff attended the New Forest Affordable Housing Development Group meeting at Appletree Court on 29 November. This meeting focussed on a discussion of the affordable housing policies in New Forest District Council's Core Strategy Preferred Options.
- Secondary legislation which deems the New Forest National Park to be wholly within the South East, for regional planning purposes, took effect from 18 December 2007. This should simplify planning in the National Park, as the Authority will no longer have to demonstrate that its emerging policies are in conformity with the policies for both the South East and the South West region.

- The Authority hosted the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Development Plan Officers' Group meeting on 14 December. The agenda included discussion of the various approaches taken to dealing with the Local Development Framework requirements.
- Staff responded to public queries by telephone and letter regarding the potential affordable housing scheme at Pilley. Staff also met with the landowner, architect and Hyde Housing Association to discuss the potential development of land at Cadnam for local needs affordable housing.

11 Development Control

During **November** the Development Control unit carried out the following work:

Planning applications: received 92. Applications were registered within three working days following receipt.

Planning decisions: 81 issued of which 64 (79%) were approved, and 13 (16%) were refused. Four applications were withdrawn. Ten (12%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 20 November.

82% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 55% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

Live planning applications: 320 at 30 November, compared with 317 at 31 October.

Appeals: Six new appeals were received this month. Of the nine appeal decisions in November, four were allowed and five dismissed.

Enforcement: 43 new enforcement cases were registered in November and 65 cases were closed. There were 261 outstanding enforcement cases at the end of the month. No enforcement notices were served during November.

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

Planning applications: received 82. Applications were registered within three working days following receipt.

Planning decisions: 92 issued, of which 73 (79%) were approved and 19 (21%) were refused. Six applications were withdrawn. Six (7%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 18 December.

85% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 76% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

Live planning applications: 304 at 31 December, compared with 320 at 30 November.

Appeals: Two new appeals received this month. Of the 11 appeal decisions in December, three were allowed and eight dismissed.

Enforcement: 25 new enforcement cases were registered in December and 52 cases were closed. There were 251 outstanding enforcement cases at the end of the month. One enforcement notice was served during December.

12 Environmental Design

- The team was consulted by Development Control on 61 applications during November, 39 of which were returned within the 14 day target date. **(Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7)**
- Fourteen tree work applications were registered during November and 20 determined, 95% within the eight week target date. Two Tree Preservation Orders were made.
- Consultants are progressing well with the review of conservation areas in the National Park **(Corporate Plan Objective C7)**. Public consultations on the proposals for Forest South East and Forest Central (North and South) have been held and a report on these two proposals is being presented to this Authority meeting. Survey work has now been completed on the third proposed conservation area which contains the settlements of Copythorne, Winsor, Woodlands and parts of Netley Marsh and Bartley. A similar public consultation took place at the start of January.
- The team was consulted by Development Control on 51 applications during December, 21 of which were returned within the 14 day target date. **(Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7)**
- Thirteen tree work applications were registered during December and eight determined, 100% within the eight week target date. One Tree Preservation Order was made.
- Mark Stephenson, Building Conservation Officer, has been working closely with Frank Green, Archaeologist, to provide expert advice on built heritage projects going forward as part of the Authority's Heritage Lottery Fund Bid currently being compiled by Libby Holmes in the Conservation Recreation and Sustainable Development Directorate. The work is involving assessing the best methods of conserving a number of historic features ranging from WWII structures, 1900's stone memorials to 'hunt' members killed

on the hunt and cast iron 'Plates' which commemorate the re-inclosure of a number of woodlands between 1880 – 1913 by Deputy Surveyor Lascelles.

- Negotiations are continuing over a number of Listed Buildings At Risk including Hyde Farm barns and 'The Salterns', Lower Pennington. The 'Salterns', a pair of 18th century buildings associated with the salt trade, are a unique survival. The conservation of these buildings is involving the Development Control, Conservation Recreation and Sustainable Development and Environmental Design teams. **(Corporate Plan Objective C7)**

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.
- The Member Services equality and diversity Champion monitored and progressed action points arising from the equality and disability assessment undertaken on a Planning Development Control Committee meeting.
- Member Services compiled and distributed updates to the members' authority folders following the adoption by the Authority of the revised local Protocols. In addition, Member Services organised an informal get together for members and officers and arranged several workshops including the planning policy review session on 18 December.
- The Section has completed its review of the members' training programme and is now completing arrangements for various activities and events. In conjunction with the Authority's Senior Solicitor the Section is undertaking a review of the Authority's Standing Orders.
- Member Services also provides support to the New Forest Consultative Panel and, in addition to arranging and supporting meetings of the Panel, has sent out the new draft Consultative Panel leaflet for members' comments and, having looked at data protection issues surrounding release of Panel members' details, has arranged for the distribution of a consent form for completion by members.

Corporate services

14 Human Resources

- As of 31 December 2007 the Authority had 70 permanent members of staff (65.34 FTE), of whom 12 are part time, 12 are on fixed term contracts and 1 post is externally funded. There are no current vacancies.
- In December Deborah Slade joined the Authority as a Planning Officer.
- Jo Holmes took up the permanent role of Web Content Developer on 10 December.
- Cathie Turner Jones started maternity leave in January and Sue Castleton has been recruited as Interim Human Resources Manager until Cathie's return.
- A further meeting with Unison took place in December. Good progress continues to be made on consultation over draft HR policies. All staff are also being given opportunity to comment on the policies at this stage.
- A scheme to provide tax efficient child care vouchers for qualifying staff has been launched. The 'Busy Bees' scheme can potentially provide savings of between £1000 to £1200 per employee on the scheme, at no additional net cost to the Authority.

15 ICT

- In house development of applications to meet business needs has been received well by staff and the Authority's time recoding system is on schedule to be piloted in February with a planned launch to coincide with the new financial year.
- Work to establish a master contact database for the Authority is entering the development phase and is scheduled to be in test / pilot by the summer.
- A refreshed website is being tested with ICT supporting the Information and Visitor Services directorate to complete trials

16 Finance and Performance

- Budget preparation for 2008/09 is underway. First draft budget proposals have been presented to the Authority Management Board. Following further review the proposed budget will be presented for consideration to Resources and Performance Committee in March.

- Paul Carey-Kent, Deputy Treasurer, Hampshire County Council, has now taken up the role as the Authority's Chief Finance Officer. Paul will be taking a draft Financial Strategy for 2008/09 – 2010/11 to the January Resources and Performance Committee.
- Defra has announced the funding for national parks for 2008/09 and provisionally through to 2010/11. The Authority's allocation includes the addition of the planning funding element previously not included in the core grant. The allocation also provides for an additional £200,000 in the second and third years in recognition of the unusual pressures that the Authority has to operate under as a new organisation.
- The three year settlement will assist the Authority's forward planning and budgeting and will enable a slightly longer term view to be considered.

Recommendation

To note the report.