

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 26 MARCH 2008

EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION STRATEGY UPDATE

Report by: Nigel Matthews, Head of Visitor Services, Amanda Elmes, Education Officer, and Jim Mitchell, Interpretation Officer

Summary:

The Authority approved the Education and Interpretation Strategy for 2007-2010 in June 2007 including a range of methods for delivery and evaluation. This report gives an early update on progress so far and asks for members' approval of a mobile information unit for which plans are now well advanced.

Recommendations:

- 1 To comment on and note the update.**
- 2 To comment on and approve the plans for a mobile information unit.**

Resources:

2008-2009 budget request:

- £17,000 for education projects;
- £31,500 for interpretation and information projects including the New Forest Centre;
- £43,375 for the New Forest Centre agreement;
- £32,000 for educational campaigns and outreach;
- £4,000 for boundary markers;
- £33,500 for a mobile unit.

Papers

NFNPA 244/08:	Cover paper
NFNPA 244/08 Annex 1:	Education and Interpretation Strategy Update
NFNPA 244/08 Annex 2:	Mobile information unit proposals

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EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION STRATEGY UPDATE

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In June 2007 the Authority approved a strategy to guide the New Forest National Park Authority's education and interpretation provision from April 2007 to March 2010.
- 1.2 Item 7.4.13 of the strategy committed the Authority to 'investigating the potential for a mobile information unit'. The rationale given was that these are used by a number of National Park Authorities to provide information and interpretation at key sites and at key times, and that in the New Forest, where new permanent structures are often undesirable, such a unit could work well.
- 1.3 Feasibility work on the unit, and staff's desire to press ahead with it have prompted this report which updates members and seeks approval for the unit in time for it to be operational in the summer of 2008.

2 Education and Interpretation Strategy update

- 2.1 The Education and Interpretation Strategy for 2007-2010 included a range of methods for delivery and evaluation.
- 2.2 Education was taken to focus on the more formal education sector and on young people whereas interpretation is more wide-ranging and includes 'life-long learning'.
- 2.3 Outcomes of the Authority's education and interpretation work were that people will:
 - understand more about the National Park and why it is special; and as a result
 - value the New Forest more; and therefore
 - behave in a way which ensures that the special qualities of the New Forest National Park remain and are enhanced for this and future generations.
- 2.4 A range of different audiences were identified, including people who already interact with the National Park, under-represented groups and hard-to-reach audiences:

- local people who live within or close to the boundary of the National Park
- visitors (and potential visitors) who travel from further afield and spend time in the National Park
- organised groups, including formal and informal sectors
- black and minority ethnic communities
- people from inner cities
- young people (particularly 14-24 year olds)
- people with disabilities (including Special Educational Needs)
- local communities identified as high in the Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2004, and
- local people who interact with the National Park to the detriment of the Park's special qualities.

2.5 As planned, much of the work is being done in partnership with existing providers; rarely is it appropriate for the Authority to work independently of organisations which, in the main, pre-date National Park designation by many years.

2.6 **Annex 1** summarises progress against each of the areas of education and interpretation work listed in the 2007-2010 strategy. Key successes include:

- establishment of the New Forest Educators' Forum and production of a guide to promote the work of the 16 educators in the group;
- production of 14 educational fact sheets;
- development of the Fun Zone on the website;
- direct teaching contact with some 1300 students;
- enabling a further 1300 students from target areas to have first hand, high quality contact with the National Park through the travel grant scheme;
- a promising start to work with underrepresented groups such as young people (through the 'Our Shout' performance at the Management Plan workshop) and established working relationship with the Southampton Chinese Association;
- awareness panels produced for 20 existing visitor locations around the National Park;
- agreement for boundary markers at 50 locations;
- many more unnecessary highways signs removed;
- production and distribution of animal emergency hotlines cards and agreement for rationalisation of signs warning of animal accidents;
- successful live webcam project raising awareness of birds of prey and ground nesting birds;
- successful involvement in litter campaign work;
- pilot events programme attended by 1414 people, leading to expanded programme for 2008;
- clear and tangible progress with rebranding the New Forest Centre and increasing its National Park content;
- agreement for National Park presence in visitor information centres and well-advanced plans for Local Information Points;
- proposal for mobile unit ready to run this summer.

- 2.7 Various leaflets, booklets, signs and photographs of this work will be displayed at the Authority meeting and officers will be available to discuss these before and after the meeting.
- 2.8 Excellent progress has been made, a credit to the skills and energy of the Education and Interpretation Officers who have fronted much of the work. There is still much to be done and no changes are proposed to the Strategy at this stage.

Recommendation 1:

To comment on and note the update.

3 Mobile information and interpretation unit

3.1 Rationale

3.1.1 The purpose of a National Park mobile information and interpretation unit would be to deliver National Park messages and information, to encourage sustainable enjoyment of the New Forest National Park and to increase understanding of what makes it special.

3.1.2 A unit would offer a clearly visible Authority presence and information and interpretation via:

- a mobile unit information ranger / member of staff;
- partner staff / volunteer rangers;
- publications / leaflets;
- displays / interpretation;
- activities / focus for events;
- National Park messages and behavioural messages.

3.1.3 It would be used at a variety of locations in and around the park, both urban and rural including coastal car parks, Crown Land car parks and recreational sites, other open areas such as Hampshire County Council and National Trust commons, visitor attractions, towns and villages in the National Park and towns and cities further afield such as Southampton, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Salisbury.

3.1.4 The success of the unit would depend on:

- its inherent mobility, enabling the Authority to go to where the people are, at a wide range of locations;
- its low impact on the landscape (no additional permanent on-site infrastructure is needed);
- the person to be appointed to staff the unit will have excellent communication skills to engage with the full range of visitors to the unit;
- the cooperation and partnership with landowners and managers of the locations from which the unit will operate;
- the interactive exhibits, games and take-home information which will encourage relevant, enjoyable and informative conversation.

3.2 Options

- 3.2.1 Various options for a mobile unit have been considered, including large and small vehicles and trailers.
- 3.2.2 Tenders were invited from six companies to assist with deciding on the type of unit and providing the content. We looked for innovative and new ideas to enable it to become more than an information unit and more of an interpretation resource for visitors to learn fully about the National Park. There was also an emphasis on sustainability. Haley Sharpe Design was chosen to advise on the nature of the unit and how it would function; the drawings in **Annex 2** have been provided by them.
- 3.2.3 Discussions with several companies and other mobile unit operators have emphasised that the best solution is one which is easy to use, move and set up. Currently, the best option is thought to be a customised small van, probably a diesel mega van which would combine a high level of fuel efficiency and value for money.

3.3 Audiences

- 3.3.1 The audiences for the unit are identified in the Education and Interpretation Strategy as all who interact with the National Park, but more specifically:
- day visitors, local people, tourists and specialist groups who visit the location where the mobile unit is located.
- 3.3.2 This means that to be successful the unit will need to cater for a wide range of different users. It would be designed to meet the needs of disabled users.
- 3.3.3 The Tourism South East 2005 visitor Survey noted that only 10% of visitors used information boards and only 6% used visitor information centres. These figures indicate the vast majority of visitors to the Forest are not engaged with the two primary ways of currently getting messages across. A unit would help engage with this majority.
- 3.3.4 A unit would enable contact with visitors (including local people who live in and use the Forest regularly) who may only tend to use one or two sites and would not normally seek out information about the National Park. These are identified in the Education and Interpretation Strategy as an example of hard-to-reach local people.
- 3.3.5 Forestry Commission PROGRESS survey data show that many Crown Land car parks are regularly used by 50-250 people, and attendance at other locations, for example town centres and visitor attractions, would be much higher. An average attendance of only 150 people would give a total audience of 15,000 if the unit was used on 100 days between July and October. The actual total would depend on various factors including weather conditions, publicity about the location of the unit, choice of location

depending on time of year and the percentage of visitors at a location who choose to visit the unit.

- 3.3.6 The unit could also be used by permanent staff, for example to extend the Authority's education work in schools.

3.4 Partnership support and permissions

- 3.4.1 Potential partners have indicated a willingness to commit staff-time to this project, including the Forestry Commission, National Trust and the New Forest Centre. This would ensure there could be two people on duty on most days.

- 3.4.2 The unit would operate on land owned by partners such as the Forestry Commission with their permission.

3.5 Costs and timescale

- 3.5.1 Costs are detailed in **Annex 2**. £33,500 has been identified in the Information and Visitor Services 2008-09 budget bid to implement this project.

- 3.5.2 During 2008, the trial season will start in July and run until the end of October and it is proposed that a seasonal, full time mobile unit ranger be employed by the Authority during this time to co-ordinate the running of the unit, to provide the main Authority presence on the unit and work with partner representatives. The ranger would be based at South Efford House, but the majority of time would be operating the unit. In subsequent years, we anticipate the contract would last from March to October.

- 3.5.3 The following key dates are recommended to enable a unit to be up and running for summer 2008:

- production commenced April 2008;
- job advertised end April 2008;
- successful applicant starts July 2008 (until end October 2008);
- unit and content delivered early July 2008.

Recommendation 2:

To comment on and approve the plans for a mobile information and interpretation unit