

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**AUTHORITY MEETING – 28 JUNE 2007**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

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

**Summary**

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 April and May.

**Recommendation**

**To note the report.**

**Resources**

Routine

**Paper**

NFNPA 186/07: Cover paper

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## NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### AUTHORITY MEETING – 28 JUNE, 2007

#### CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

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

- 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 April and May. This has been a busy period for staff with extra work on drawing up business plans, financial management and rolling out a new staff appraisal system in addition to the ongoing work. Following the local government elections we welcome Maureen Holding to the Authority who replaces Jeremy Heron as one of New Forest District Council appointees.

#### Members

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

- Meeting of the New Forest Consultative Panel, 10 May
- Workshop on the Second Purpose, 14 May
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 15 May
- Joint Core Strategy meeting, 24 May
- Authority Away Day, 4 June
- Planning Seminar, 6 June
- Core Strategy Joint Members Advisory Group meeting, 11 June
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 14 June
- Informal briefing and discussion session on mineral allocation sites, 14 June
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 19 June
- New Forest District Council's informal session on the Core Strategy 'Preferred Options', 20 June.

- 3 Forthcoming activities include:

- Meeting of the New Forest Consultative Panel, 5 July
- Core Strategy Joint Members Advisory Group meeting, 16 July
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 17 July
- Council for National Parks annual general meeting, 18 July
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association meeting and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Improvement Board meeting, 27 July
- Core Strategy Joint Members Advisory Group meeting, 7 August

- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, followed by informal session on the proposed options for the Management Plan and Core Strategy, 21 August
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 28 August
- Consultative Panel Tour, 12 September.

## **DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS**

### **First Purpose**

#### **Conservation and Enhancement**

##### **4 Partnership Working**

- Libby Holmes took up the post of Project Development Officer for the Life in Common Project at the end of April. The post is funded as part of the successful Project Planning Grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) under its Landscape Partnership Scheme. We now enter the next stage of the application process for a maximum grant of £2 million to develop and implement a Landscape Partnership Project in the New Forest for which match-funding must be secured. An initial meeting with HLF at the beginning of May reported that competition will be fierce due to the demands of the 2012 Olympics, a marked change from discussions a year ago.
- Authority staff and Jim Green from Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service have organised a meeting with key partners to discuss Wildfires in the New Forest. The meeting will take place later in June and will look at establishing a wildfire partnership to address some of the problems of uncontrolled fire in the area.

##### **5 Corporate Plan**

#### **Commoning and farming; Nature conservation (C1/C3)**

- The Commoning Review Steering group has received the final reports from topic groups set up to look into various issues relating to commoning. This includes new research on the economics of pony and cattle keeping. It is hoped that the final report will be ready to present to the Authority at the New Forest Show in July.
- Work to refine and complete the documentation for the Commoners' Dwelling Scheme is continuing. This may involve some minor amendments to the criteria for approving applicants for the scheme.

#### **Landscape conservation (C2)**

- Research has now been commissioned to update a survey on the use of recreational horses in the New Forest carried out in 1994. The research aims to identify any key trends in the scale, impact and use of land for

recreational horse-keeping between 1994 and 2007 and will inform future policy and actions that the Authority may wish to take in enclosed areas of the New Forest.

- Staff have been investigating whether a landscape sensitivity analysis would be useful for the New Forest in helping to make decisions in the context of development control, planning and conservation.

### **Nature Conservation (C3)**

- Staff have attended and contributed to a workshop of all the National Park Ecologists on the topic of Climate Change and National Parks.
- The first meeting of the Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group has been held. Key stakeholders endorsed the Authority's approach to the process and it was agreed that a project to audit the condition of biodiversity in the New Forest was needed to support the Biodiversity Action Plan process. A successful consultant has now been commissioned to do this study.
- With other officers, staff supported the Spring Event at Pennington Marshes and assisted with a guided walk and related activities.

### **Sustainable Development (C4/SE1/SE2/SE3)**

- The Forest Friendly Farming Business Grant Scheme Panel approved nine applications for business grants which help add value to local produce or support sustainable land management.
- National Park staff, in association with New Forest District Council, organised a workshop for the existing New Forest Local Action Group members and wider stakeholders to discuss ideas and proposals for an application to SEEDA for the new LEADER programme covering the 2007-2013 period. Ideas from the workshop have now been worked up into a draft proposal around the twin themes of renewable energy and new schemes building on the Forest Friendly Farming project. Further discussions will decide which proposals will be put forward to form the basis of the New Forest expression of interest. This has to be submitted by early July 2007 with the final application due by the end of the year.
- Staff met officers of the Rural Safety Team at Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service to discuss their plans for the extension of the Rural Safety Office and their intention to extend areas of work to cover animal rescue training, advisory visits to farms and equine establishments to assist in compliance with the Fire Safety, the development of fire plans and training to encourage the safe storage, use and disposal of hazardous materials. Staff will be assisting the Rural Safety officers to secure external funding to expand their resources.

- A number of staff have been involved in the continuing process of preparing a Sustainability Appraisal, Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Core Strategy.
- The simplified arrangements for applications for small grants under the Sustainable Development Fund have been launched. £5,000 of the Fund's budget has been allocated for small grants of up to £500 following a suggestion from the Fund's Panel, with a simpler application and monitoring procedure.

### **Conservation of cultural heritage (C6)**

- Jointly with Environmental Design colleagues, the team hosted a visit by the National Parks joint conservation officers and archaeologists' group meeting. Site visits were made to Hurst Castle followed by a walk to view a range of issues on Hurst Spit. Beaulieu Abbey and mill were visited and cultural heritage issues were discussed between Beaulieu and Bucklers Hard. A talk on Maritime Archaeology was provided by Mark Dunkerley from English Heritage. The Government's Recent Heritage White Paper was discussed and the group prepared an English National Park Authorities Association response. Colleagues from English Heritage, Cadw (Welsh Assembly Governments Historic Environment Service), and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales attended and advice was provided on potential changes to the consents process for Scheduled Monuments.
- Staff attended the AGM of the Avon Valley Archaeological Society.
- A considerable amount of time has gone into providing archaeological data, interpretation and advice on five large farm environment plans to support landowners in the process of applying for higher level Environmental Stewardship from Natural England. This has highlighted the need for better survey information on the enclosed landscapes of the Park.

## **Second Purpose**

### **Recreation, Access and Transport**

#### **6 Partnership working**

- The first ever Ground Staff Networking Event was organised by Authority staff. The event aimed to provide an opportunity for participants to network together and share thoughts and ideas on the delivery and provision for recreation. National Park Authority staff were on hand to answer questions and help to explain the Authority's role. In total 25 people attended representing a variety of organisations which operate 'on the ground' across the National Park including the Forestry Commission, National Trust, New Forest Museum, New Forest Visitor Information Centres, and Hampshire County Council. The event was

positively received and there was demand for the session to be repeated later on in the season for those unable to attend.

- National Park Authority staff attended and supported a recent PROGRESS open day event for the public held at Wilverley enclosure.

## **7 Corporate Plan**

### **Recreation and Visitor Management (U1):**

- Land Use Consultants have been appointed to work on the development of the Recreation Management Strategy, and consultation elements of the National Park Management Plan. The consultation strategy is now being planned for the autumn and potential venues for large consultation events are being assessed.
- National Park Authority staff attended the Blashford Lakes Forum to give an update on the National Park Authority work and participate in discussions.
- Staff facilitated a workshop on the second purpose for members.
- The first 'Walking in Mind' guided walks have taken place. This pilot scheme is supported by the National Park Authority, Forestry Commission and Hampshire County Council and is intended to demonstrate the positive effects that walking in the countryside can have on mental well-being. The first phase lasts for 12 weeks with 1 or 2 walks each week on various routes in and close to the National Park. Walks will start at 30 minutes, and will increase in length according to the participants' abilities.

### **Traffic and Transport (U2):**

- Various meetings have taken place including:
  - Hampshire Highways to discuss their draft maintenance strategy
  - The Tour of Britain organisers to establish how to maximise the opportunities for promoting national park messages when the Tour of Britain passes through the New Forest on September 10, and to advise on organisations that need to be involved with the practical implications of the event e.g. the Verderers
  - Hampshire County Council looking at how best to develop workplace travel plans with business across the New Forest, including visitor attractions
  - National Park Transport Officers Group meeting in Birmingham
  - New Forest Cycle Working group meeting
  - Local Transport Plan steering group meeting
- The New Forest Tour was launched on 26 May.

## **Countryside and Rights of Way Act and Access Forum (U7):**

- Staff have worked with members of Hampshire and New Forest Access Forums and County Council officers to revise the Hampshire County Council policy on Vehicles in the Countryside. The policy, once approved by Council members, will give a clear direction for officers in dealing with management and maintenance issues on vehicular rights of way.
- Staff have worked with The Access Company on the content of an 'Easy Access' questionnaire, which was distributed to appropriate local and national user groups. The resultant report will guide the content and design of information to be produced about the accessibility of countryside sites in the area.
- Two new members to the Access Forum, who will represent access to water, conservation and land management were successfully recruited.

## **8 Information and Visitor Services**

### **Corporate Plan**

- The third edition of the Authority's newsletter, *Park Life*, was published and distributed in early May. **(A1, U3)**
- Work continued and picked up pace on organising and preparing for this year's New Forest Show stand. **(U3)**
- Work neared completion on the short introductory film about the National Park for use first at the Show and then in presentations, talks and on the website. **(U3, U4)**
- The website was improved with new material about trees and in the consultations section among others. **(A1, U3)**
- The education Fun Zone for the website is progressing rapidly with much of the design and content agreed and an interactive 'take care of a pony' game in preparation. **(U4)**
- New photographs were added to the National Park Photographic Library **(A1, U3)**
- The new Information and Visitor Services Directorate was established. **(A1)**
- Plans to install boundary markers and reduce sign clutter are progressing with various recommendations being brought to the Authority meeting. There is still work to be done to resolve details of changes to signage at the cattle grid 'gateway' locations especially with regard to warnings about animal accidents. **(U3)**
- The goshawk webcam project at the Reptile Centre has proved very popular with visitors and is proving a useful platform from which messages about ground nesting birds can be conveyed. **(U3)**
- During May the Authority was involved in three events: a Trees Please walk, Spring Wildlife Day at Keyhaven and the New Forest Breakfast and Birdwatch. All were well attended and feedback has been positive. **(U3)**
- Arrangements to subsidise the travels costs of school community groups for visits to educational venues in the New Forest are being piloted

through the Educators' Forum within target areas of Southampton and Bournemouth. **(U4)**

### **Partnership working**

- Work started to organise a picnic event for disadvantaged youngsters jointly with the Forestry Commission to celebrate National Parks' Week in July. **(C2)**
- Discussions with stakeholders have resulted in a long list of additional ways in which the various organisations involved, including the Authority, can reduce animal accidents. **(U3)**
- Negotiations with the New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust to finalise the Authority's Association at The New Forest Centre have been completed and the Agreement signed with a start date of 1 July. The new Centre Manager starts in July and we look forward to developing a productive working relationship with The Centre. **(U3)**

### **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)**

## **9 Planning Policy**

### **Corporate Plan**

#### **Partnership working (A3):**

- Three workshops have been held to consider potential policies to deliver on the draft Management Plan objectives – April 5 (Conservation and Enhancement); April 19 (Living and Working); April 26 (Understanding and Enjoyment). These involved a range of key stakeholders and local experts, and were led by Nick Evans, Senior Planner.

#### **National Park Management Plan (A3):**

- Consultants have been appointed to assist with the production of the Recreation Management Strategy, and the consultation arrangements for the National Park Management Plan. Linked to this, a workshop was held for members on 14 May to explore the National Park's second statutory purpose (the understanding and enjoyment of the Park).

#### **Spatial planning policies (A4):**

- The Authority was represented at the Examination in Public of the draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy (SWRSS) by John Clements, Head of Policy and Plans. The first two day session, considered the adequacy of the Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Strategy. The Authority was able to elaborate its concerns to ensure that any measures

needed to mitigate potential adverse impacts on European designated habitats arising from the scale of development proposed for the Bournemouth/Christchurch area were fully identified, and to work outside the formal sessions with other authorities and agencies to draft proposed solutions for the examining Panel's consideration. The second, three day, session considered the proposals for the Bournemouth – Poole – Christchurch sub-region and the Authority was invited to participate in debates on the adequacy of green infrastructure provision, the proposed revisions to the greenbelt and the impacts on protected habitats within and adjacent to the sub-region.

- The Core Strategy Joint Members' Advisory Group met on 13 April, 24 May and 11 June. These informal meetings considered potential spatial strategy options for development within New Forest District, climate change, local economy, green space, biodiversity, affordable housing, the strategic flood risk assessment, the transport assessment and the initial results of sustainability assessments. Following the Authority's conclusion that it would not be able to meet the demanding timescale for producing a joint Core Strategy with the District Council, staff have been working on a revised schedule for the production of a Core Strategy for the National Park alongside the production of the National Park Management Plan.
- The implications of an emerging sub-regional Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment are being considered by the team. Sarah Applegate, Senior Planner, is leading this work, which will be carried forward through the Local Development Framework. Initial findings suggest a likely need for provision of additional permanent pitches within or near the National Park, and a transit site somewhere in the western part of Hampshire.
- The National Park Authority (along with Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council) has received the binding Inspector's Report into the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Core Strategy. The Inspector considers the Core Strategy to be 'sound' and endorses the incorporation of the Wiltshire area of the National Park within the Strategy. The Core Strategy is presented for adoption as a separate agenda item.

#### **Other Work:**

- The Authority has been consulted by the National Air Traffic Services on proposed airspace changes that will affect some of the more tranquil areas of the New Forest National Park. The closing date for responses is the beginning of August 2007.
- The Chairman attended Christchurch Borough Council's Planning Committee on 21 June to consider the application for the expansion of Bournemouth Airport. He explained the Authority's grave concern over the impact of the expansion on the Park's special qualities and

expressed disappointment – both that the Authority's views had been misrepresented in the officer's report to the Committee and that there was no evidence that the Section 62 requirement had been addressed at all. Approval to proceed with the application was unanimous with no reference by either officers or members to their Section 62 responsibilities. Staff will be seeking advice from Defra on this complete disregard by a local authority of its statutory duties.

## **Development Control**

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

**Planning applications: received 124.** Applications continue to be registered within two to three working days following receipt.

**Planning decisions: 110 issued**, of which 77 were approved (70%) and 33 were refused (30%). Three applications were withdrawn. 10 (9%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 17 April.

93% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 77% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

**Live planning applications: 352 at 30 April**, compared with 341 at 31 March.

**Appeals: Ten new appeals** received this month. Of the 7 appeal decisions in April, four were allowed, two dismissed and one 'split' decision.

**Enforcement: 64 new enforcement cases** were registered in April and 39 cases were closed. There are currently some 300+ outstanding enforcement cases.

**Planning Process Review:** During April work progressed on the Planning Process Review, which included agreeing a revised phone policy for Development Control, a number of updates on Acolaid and the production of new management information reports to help monitor the section's performance.

**1APP:** Billed by DCLG as "the biggest change to the planning system in years", work has continued on rolling out 1APP, a new and simpler streamlined planning application process. The government has standardised the planning application form for use by all local planning authorities to "make the planning system clearer and more efficient for planning professionals and citizens alike".

The Authority is a pilot authority for 1APP and is working closely with the Planning Portal with a view to moving over to 1APP in June.

A poster and leaflets giving publicity to 1APP are displayed in the reception area.

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

**Planning applications: received 118.** Applications were registered within two to three working days following receipt.

**Planning decisions: 118 issued**, of which 92 were approved (78%) and 26 were refused (22%). Ten applications were withdrawn. Three (2.5%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 15 May.

87% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 85% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

**Live planning applications: 338 at 31 May**, compared with 348 at 30 April.

**Appeals: Nine new appeals** received this month. Of the 5 appeal decisions in May, two were allowed and three were dismissed.

**Enforcement: 49 new enforcement cases** were registered in May and 56 cases were closed. Three enforcement notices were issued and there remain some 300+ outstanding enforcement cases.

## 10 Environmental Design

During **April** the Environmental Design Team carried out the following work:

- 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 32 applications during April. 15 consultations were returned within the 14 day target, 1 was outside the target date, the rest are still live (**Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7**).
- Following the seminar/training for members on design, members of the team accompanied Development Control Officers on a guided tour for members of development sites.
- 14 tree work applications were registered during April and 8 determined. During April 100% were determined within the 8 week target date.
- 2 new Tree Preservation Orders were made in April.

During **May** the Environmental Design Team carried out the following work:

- The team was consulted by Development Control on 38 applications during May. 16 consultations were returned within the 14 day target, 4 were outside the target date, the rest are still live (**Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7**).
- A brief is being prepared for consultants to tender for work to review and appraise conservation areas in the National Park. Tender documents will be sent out in June.
- Work was successfully completed on two historic building grant projects – the reconstruction of a large unstable chimney at Stydd House, Lyndhurst and repointing of areas of boundary and house walls at Elcombes Lyndhurst.
- 17 tree work applications were registered during May and 22 determined. During April 100% were determined within the 8 week target date.
- 7 new Tree Preservation Orders were made in May.
- 4 tree related information leaflets were published and made available on the Authority's website:
  - British Standard 5837 (2005) – Trees in relation to construction
  - Native Species Hedgerow Planting Guide
  - Tree Pruning – advice on proper tree care
  - Some Useful Websites for Trees and Wildlife Information

[http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/index/planning/trees/tree\\_guidance.htm](http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/index/planning/trees/tree_guidance.htm)

- The tree website was updated to include the above leaflets and the Hawthorn was added as Tree of the Month for May.
- Jim Mitchell, Interpretation Officer in the Understanding and Enjoyment Directorate, organised a walk in Roydon Woods, Setley on Saturday 12 May. The walk, attended by over 20 people, was led by Bryan Wilson and coincided with the Tree Council's 'Walk In The Woods' initiative.

## 11 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 and Freedom of Information requests received by the Authority and assisting with arranging training.
- Member Services has made arrangements for the induction of the Authority's new member, Maureen Holding, including revising the induction pack.

- The section has also analysed the results of the satisfaction surveys of members and the public and created action points arising from responses to the questionnaire, which officers are in the process of completing.
- A final draft of the rolling members' training programme has now been produced. Member Services has assisted the Chairman and Deputy Chairman in completing the annual assessments of Secretary of State members. Member Services has also issued a 'preferences' document for members on Committee membership and representation on external organisations in preparation for the Authority's Annual meeting; assisted the New Forest Association of Local Councils with the procedural aspects of the re-appointment of Parish members to the Authority; and drafted a number of procedural reports for the Annual meeting of the Authority

## **Corporate services**

### **12 Human Resources**

- The Occupational Health Consultancy Ltd. have been appointed as the Authority's provider of occupational health services. These services will include health promotion activity as well as access to specialist counselling following a referral. The Authority currently has an extremely low level of sickness absence. These new services will provide a proactive preventative approach and help ensure that the Authority's staff are supported and their well being maintained.
- Disability impact assessments are being completed at team and unit level. The results from these assessments will inform the Disability Equality Scheme action plan which will be incorporated into the published scheme.
- The Authority's staff appraisal scheme was launched at the end of May with training for managers and a briefing for staff. The scheme is a pilot and feedback from participants will be used to revise the scheme in January 2008.
- Following the successful bid to Quality South East for consultancy funding, the Authority is working with Debbie Clark Consulting on a gap analysis to establish the work required to meet the Investors in People standard.
- As of mid-June the Authority has 67 staff, of whom 11 are part time, 12 are on time-limited contracts and 1 is externally funded. There are three vacancies. Jeff Haynes retired from the local government service in June, following a long career – mainly with national park authorities. Claire Sherwood joined us on 29 May as the new part time Communications Assistant.

### 13 ICT

- Nearly 42,000 distinct visits were made to the Authority's web site in May, of the 50% for which the geographical location is known, approximately 16% of the 'hits' were from North America and the remaining 34% from Europe.
- Further work in improving the search facilities within the Geographical Information System (GIS) and updates are planned in June.
- Officers are visiting other 'best practice' sites to look for ways in which the Authority can enhance the integration of the GIS with the Plantech planning applications.

### 14 Finance and Performance

- A lessons learnt review following the closing of 2006/07 financial year has highlighted several areas for improvement in the Authority's procedures and systems for budgetary control. As a result a small finance group has been established within the Authority which will provide a single point of contact and communication between the Authority and New Forest District Council's accountancy staff. The new procedures will clarify responsibility for the control of monitoring and reporting of budget variances.
- Business plans for teams are now in draft and final versions will be collated and signed off by the end of June.
- Work to support discussions with Defra on the basis for the Authority's funding in the next spending review period (2008/9-2010/11) is taking place. A report will be submitted before the Recess. Ministerial decisions on budget allocations are expected in the late autumn.

### **Recommendation**

**To note the report.**