

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**AUTHORITY MEETING – 28 FEBRUARY 2008**

**ARRANGEMENTS FOR TOURISM IN THE NEW FOREST AND EUROPARC,  
EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN PROTECTED  
AREAS**

**Report by:** Chris Gregory, Transport and Tourism Officer

**Summary:**

This report is in two parts, the first deals with the arrangements for tourism in the New Forest and the second with potential accreditation under EUROPARC, European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.

Part one sets out the principles for joint working on sustainable tourism between the Authority and the New Forest District Council's tourism service.

The key role for the Authority is to support the development of sustainable tourism in the New Forest but New Forest District Council will continue to lead the provision of tourism services.

Part two describes the EUROPARC European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas which seeks to recognise national parks that are following best practice in developing and managing sustainable tourism.

The report sets out the process of applying for the Charter and asks whether the Authority should pursue Charter status for the New Forest National Park.

**Recommendations:**

- 1. To note and approve the proposed approach to the Authority's work on sustainable tourism.**
- 2. To decide whether the Authority should seek Charter accreditation under the EUROPARC European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.**

**Resources - part one of the report:**

New Forest National Park Authority - ongoing staff time (roughly 0.2 FTE or 40 days)

## **Resources - part two of the report:**

2008 – 2009: EUR 500 (£360) Registration fee

2009 – 2010: EUR 4000 (£2,900) Verification fees

Ongoing commitment of staff time to manage the process of about 0.2 FTE (mostly the Transport and Tourism Officer)

## **Corporate Plan - whole report:**

Parts of:

- C3 Conserve and enhance the nature conservation value of the New Forest National Park.
- U1 Produce a recreation and visitor management strategy for the National Park and surrounding areas.
- U2 Review strategies and develop proposals to reduce the impact of traffic on the special environment of the National Park and promote alternatives to private car use, working jointly with relevant authorities.
- U3 Improve everyone's understanding and awareness of the New Forest National Park, in particular hard-to-reach groups.
- SE1 Promote sustainable development within the National Park as the basis for the social and economic well-being of local communities.
- SE3 Support existing and encourage new businesses and community services which enhance the New Forest environment while providing economic and community benefits.

## **Papers:**

- NFNPA 235/08:** Cover Paper
- NFNPA 235/08 Annex 1:** Underlying principles for joint working between the Authority and New Forest District Council's Tourism Service
- NFNPA 235/08 Annex 2:** Twelve principles for sustainable tourism in protected areas
- NFNPA 235/08 Annex 3:** The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (full text)
- NFNPA 235/08 Annex 4:** Flowchart - application and verification process

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This report is in two parts, the first deals with the arrangements for tourism in the New Forest and the second with potential accreditation under EUROPARC, European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.

**PART ONE****1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This paper aims to set out how the Authority's tourism related work fits into the existing destination management process of the wider New Forest.

**2 Background**

- 2.1 Tourism in the New Forest has traditionally been managed by New Forest District Council's tourism service, working closely with the New Forest Tourism Association and other partners. The Authority wishes to engage with this process to ensure that appropriate messages are conveyed to visitors which promote opportunities for understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park.
- 2.2 An 'underlying principles for joint working' paper has been developed and refined by officers from both organisations, in order to make the joint working process effective, transparent, and free of duplication.
- 2.3 The joint working paper will also be considered by the New Forest District Council Cabinet in April alongside its report on the outcome of the Fundamental Service Review of its tourism functions.

**3 Principles for joint working**

- 3.1 The draft paper in **Annex 1** sets out the underlying principles for joint working between the Authority and New Forest District Council's tourism service. It states how both organisations are committed to working together to deliver the highest possible standards in tourism, interpretation and information provision.

3.2 **Annex 1** is split into three main sections which cover:

- the principles for joint working;
- sustainable tourism policy;
- sustainable tourism destination management – current projects.

3.3 Formal liaison at officer level takes place every three months; although in reality there is more frequent contact between organisations as appropriate.

3.4 To ensure that the content of the paper remains relevant and current, it is proposed that it be formally reviewed annually.

#### **4 The Authority's role and resources**

4.1 Promotion of sustainable tourism is not a specific purpose nor duty of the Authority, however there are important links to the National Park's two purposes and its duty to foster the socio-economic well being of local communities. Tourism did not emerge as a priority for action in consultations about the Authority's initial work programme. Where tourism is being promoted, the Authority aims to work with providers to ensure that tourism in the National Park is sustainable although

4.2 At a strategic level, the Authority seeks to influence recreation, tourism and visitor management by working with and through existing providers to support and enhance the provision of information and interpretation about the National Park.

4.3 Currently, New Forest District Council's budget for tourism is around £700,000 gross, and around £300,000 net, including three head office staff plus Visitor Information Centres. By contrast, the Authority only has the resource to allocate around one day per week of the Transport and Tourism Officer's time to tourism related activity (i.e. about 0.2 full time equivalents). The Authority's total budget for the second purpose, including interpretation and education, is around £288,500 per annum and our specific tourism budget is currently £25,000 in 2007/08.

4.4 It is therefore necessary for the Authority to develop a role which adds value to the work of New Forest District Council and others' activity and ensures delivery of both National Park purposes (and duty) but does not attempt to displace or take over the work of others.

#### **Recommendation**

1. **To note and approve the proposed approach to the Authority's work on sustainable tourism.**

## **PART TWO**

### **5 Introduction**

- 5.1 The EUROPARC European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas seeks to recognise national parks which are following best practice in developing and managing sustainable tourism. It is concerned with structures, objectives and actions, including their comprehensiveness and sustainability.
- 5.2 The Authority, as a member of EUROPARC and a recognised protected area, is eligible to apply for Charter status.

### **6 Background to EUROPARC**

- 6.1 EUROPARC is the umbrella organisation of Europe's protected areas. It seeks to unite national parks, regional parks, nature parks and biosphere reserves in 38 countries, with the common aim of protecting Europe's unique variety of wildlife, habitats and landscapes.
- 6.2 The EUROPARC Federation has over 370 member organisations which are responsible for the management of more than 400 protected areas across the continent. EUROPARC provides them with a forum to share professional experience, collaborate on technical projects and progress common aims.
- 6.3 EUROPARC realises its aims through a range of practical activities and initiatives which includes the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.

### **7 Background to the EUROPARC European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas**

- 7.1 The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas was set up in 1995, as a project funded by the European Union's LIFE programme.
- 7.2 Ten European parks piloted the approach and a final version of the Charter was published in 2000.
- 7.3 The first applicant parks were verified in late spring / early summer 2001 by appointed tourism experts, and the first successful applicants were awarded the Charter in autumn 2001. The following UK protected landscapes have so far achieved Charter status or are working towards accreditation:
- Broads Authority;
  - Brecon Beacons National Park;
  - Exmoor National Park;
  - Mourne Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
  - Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
  - Cairngorms National Park;

- The Yorkshire Dales National Park and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park are currently defined as candidate parks working towards Charter status;
  - Cornwall, Kent Downs and Norfolk Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are amongst other protected areas working towards accreditation.
- 7.4 The decision to apply for Charter status is taken by the protected area and is purely optional.
- 7.5 The Charter commits protected areas to implementing a local strategy for 'sustainable tourism' defined as: 'any form of development, management or tourist activity which ensures the long-term protection and preservation of natural, cultural and social resources and contributes in a positive and equitable manner to the economic development and well-being of individuals living, working or staying in protected areas.'
- 7.6 In addition, the Charter defines the shared responsibilities of the protected area authority, tourist businesses and other stakeholders. It is divided into two main sections:
- Sustainable tourism for the protected area;
  - Sustainable tourism for tourism businesses in the area.
- 7.7 There are two underlying aims of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, these are as follows:
- To increase awareness of, and support for, Europe's protected areas as a fundamental part of our heritage, which should be preserved for, and enjoyed by, current and future generations.
  - To improve the sustainable development and management of tourism in protected areas, which takes account of the needs of the environment, local residents, local businesses and visitors.
- 7.8 A full listing of aims and principles can be found at **Annex 2** and the full requirements of the Charter are set out in **Annex 3**.

## **8 The application process**

- 8.1 In order to achieve Charter status, the Authority would need to complete a process of application and verification (**Annex 4**), during which it must demonstrate that it fulfils the Charter requirements.
- 8.2 The steps are as follows:
- Registration as a candidate park with EUROPARC;
  - Park starts working with the Charter;
  - Completion and submission of the application documents;
  - Checking of application and selection of expert verifier;
  - Verification by an expert in sustainable tourism in protected areas;
  - Decision by the EUROPARC Evaluation Committee;

- Award of the Charter certificate to successful parks;
  - Official recognition by EUROPARC (Certificate of the Charter);
  - A commitment by the park to implement the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan (five years).
- 8.3 The period between registration as a candidate Charter Park and submission of the full application will generally be up to one year.
- 8.4 The cost to the Authority of running and coordinating the Charter would be EUR 500 (approximately £358) to register as a candidate park and EUR 4000 (approximately £2864) to cover the cost of the application assessment, plus expenses. The ongoing costs of monitoring and delivery would be met from existing resources.
- 9 Relationship with New Forest Tourism destination management**
- 9.1 Like all UK National Parks, the Authority does not have a specific tourism remit. However, the Authority supports the promotion of sustainable tourism, and recognises the importance of providing appropriate messages to visitors.
- 9.2 New Forest District Council has traditionally taken the lead in marketing the New Forest as a visitor destination, with a long record of operating visitor information services, sustainable tourism management and marketing of the New Forest, working closely with the New Forest Tourism Association, Tourism South East, Hampshire County Council, Forestry Commission and a range of other partners.
- 9.3 Sustainability has been, and will continue to be, at the forefront of New Forest District Council's approach to destination management. Sustainable tourism in the New Forest is regarded by many other destinations as best practice and the District Council has been recognised for its contribution to sustainable tourism both nationally and internationally.
- 9.4 The main policy aim is for the New Forest to become a destination where the visitor, tourism industry, community and environment are in complete harmony, and thus make a significant contribution to improving the quality of local life. This is in line with the principles of the Charter at **Annex 2**.
- 9.5 New Forest District Council Tourism Service is aware of the Charter, and would support the Authority progressing seeking accreditation, on behalf of the protected area.
- 9.6 New Forest Tourism Association was formed in 1989 and works in partnership with New Forest District Council to promote the New Forest as one of the premier tourism destinations within the UK offering a quality year-round holiday and business destination. The Association offers strong support for the Authority to proceed toward Charter status.

## 10 Fulfilling the Charter Requirements

10.1 The Charter seeks to encourage protected areas to implement a process, together with local stakeholders, that leads towards sustainable tourism development within and around the protected area. The New Forest is in the strong position of being a very advanced sustainable tourism destination but there are some basic thresholds which apply to all candidates and are essential for award of the Charter. These are:

- A working, permanent forum or similar partnership structure for sustainable tourism development in the area; documentation of its work (e.g. minutes, decisions) and evidence that it involves all relevant stakeholders. *Existing forums covering sustainable tourism include the New Forest Tourism Association Steering Group and Marketing Group, and Community Tourism Groups.*
- A live and working Strategy and Action Plan which are publicly available; an Action Plan which identifies the relevant stakeholders for each action; a budget for the Action Plan and staffing which correlate to the level of action foreseen. *The existing Tourism Destination Strategy 'Our Future Together' was adopted in 1998 and is due for revision. New Forest District Council, as author of the current strategy, has indicated a willingness to work with the Authority in revising the Strategy, also involving other partners through the mechanism of the Tourism Community Action Network.*
- Evidence that the protected area and its partners are taking action to address each of the key issues specified in the Charter principles 5-12 (**Annex 2**), and to progress or maintain high standards in these fields. (See the table below.)

Charter Principle	Measures currently in place in the New Forest
5) To protect and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage, for and through tourism, and to protect it from excessive tourism development	The Local Planning Authority formulates policies and determines applications on tourism development within the protected area.
6) To provide all visitors with a high quality experience in all aspects on their visit	This broad principle is addressed both by the work of the managing agencies, such as the Forestry Commission, together with the individual service providers, such as hotels and attractions.
7) To communicate effectively to visitors about the special qualities of the area	The Authority, together with other stakeholders, works together on this principle. Visitor Stewardship programmes are one way in which information about special qualities is communicated.

8) To encourage specific tourism products which enable discovery and understanding of the area	The New Forest Marque, the New Forest Centre, and specific attractions such as Bucklers Hard are examples of this.
9) To increase knowledge of the protected area and sustainability issues amongst all those involved in tourism	Sustainable Development Fund, Green Leaf Scheme and Green Tourism Business Scheme help to increase knowledge in this field. The Authority seeks to communicate messages about the special qualities of the National Park to all groups, including visitors.
10) To ensure that tourism supports and does not reduce the quality of life of local residents	Community Tourism Groups, Parish Councils, the Highway Authority and the Local Planning Authority can work to ensure that the tourism impacts on local residents are minimised.
11) To increase benefits from tourism to the local economy	The New Forest Tourism Association and New Forest District Council actively promote tourism to the benefit of the local economy. The Authority's Sustainable Develop Fund provides funding to support tourism related projects.
12) To monitor and influence visitor flows to reduce negative impacts	Although some research has been done in this field, more work is needed to meet this principle.

## 11 Next steps

- 11.1 Should members decide in favour of progressing Charter accreditation, the New Forest National Park would be submitted as a candidate park for the next available round of assessment, currently spring 2009. All application documents, appropriate evidence and a Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan would need to be submitted to EUROPARC by 15 December 2008, for verification around April 2009.

## 12 Discussion

- 12.1 The Charter brings a number of potential benefits to participating protected areas which include:

- Opportunities to use the process to strengthen relationships with tourism stakeholders and influence tourism development at the local level;
- A higher profile in the European arena as an area devoted to sustainable tourism;
- Public relations and awareness-raising opportunities with visitors and local and national media;
- An opportunity to work with and learn from other European Charter parks in a network;
- Helpful internal and external assessment, leading to new ideas and improvements;

- Greater credibility amongst potential funding partners;
- Raising the profile and clarifying the protected area's contribution to sustainable tourism.

12.2 However, these benefits should be carefully considered against the potential disadvantages of applying, which include:

- The resource required to fulfil the Charter application process; liaison with other national parks indicates that some 40 officer days would be required.
- The resource required to implement actions arising from the Charter. This is currently unknown but it is *expected* that this would be manageable through the existing Transport and Tourism Officer post, together with the existing networks and partnerships which already exist in the New Forest to manage tourism.
- The fact that the New Forest is already regarded as being at the forefront of sustainable tourism, and that potentially the Charter could offer little more benefit than a tick box exercise.

12.3 However, protected areas which have achieved Charter status claim that the work involved has resulted in improvements to all aspects of sustainable tourism. A series of [case studies](#) available on the EUROPARC website ( [www.europarc.org](http://www.europarc.org) ) highlight the experiences of Charter accredited parks.

12.4 The New Forest would in many respects appear to be matching Charter status, and to have done so without the added impetus arising from seeking accreditation. So it could be argued it would not be difficult to achieve – although there are financial and human resource implications – the latter failing on a post whose time is already stretched between critical traffic and transport work and tourism. On the other hand the majority of national parks have not sought to pursue Charter accreditation. Tourism is also a sensitive issue with stakeholders, some of whom have expressed concerns that national park designation would add to visitor pressure in this environmentally sensitive and crowded area. They may feel that Charter status could add to this. And much information exchange can be achieved through normal EUROPARC channels.

12.5 The decision is finely balanced but the advantages of seeking accreditation do not appear to be overwhelming in practical or presentational terms.

### **Recommendation**

- 2. To decide whether the Authority should seek Charter accreditation under the EUROPARC European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.**