

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 13 SEPTEMBER 2007

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 28 June 2007 for all work except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in June, July and August.

Recommendation:

To note the report.

Resources:

Routine

Paper:

NFNPA 199/07: Cover paper

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- 1 This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 28 June 2007 for all work except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in June, July and August.

Members

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

- 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
- New Forest Show, 24-26 July
- Tree Preservation Order Objection Panel, 25 July
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, followed by informal session on key policies for the Management Plan and Core Strategy, 21 August
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting and Forest Holidays tour, 28 August
- Sustainable Development Fund update, 30 August
- Tree Preservation Order Objection Panel, 31 August
- Access Forum meeting, 3 September
- Standards Committee meeting and training on the new Code of Conduct, 5 September
- New Forest Consultative Panel, 6 September
- Pylewell Estate - member's briefing, 7 September
- Consultative Panel Tour, 12 September.

- 3 Forthcoming activities include:

- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 18 September
- ENPAA meeting, 19 September
- ANPA UK Conference 2007, 19-21 September
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 25 September

- Joint workshop on Management Plan, Recreation Management Strategy and Local Development Framework Core Strategy, 12 October
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Improvement Board meeting, 12 October
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 16 October.

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

Conservation, Recreation and Sustainable Development

4 Partnership Working

Funding

- The New Forest has been successful in the *expression of interest stage* for the 2007-2013 programme of LEADER funding, which aims to continue aspects of the Forest Friendly Farming and New Forest Marque initiatives and develop activity in some new areas. The Local Action Group, supported by the Authority's external funding officer, is developing a full application, for submission by 18 January 2008. The Authority is holding stakeholder workshops in September to develop project ideas for the full application under each of the themes within the bid.
- The Forestry Commission has been successful in its bid for funding from the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund. The application was assisted and supported by the Authority and is for mire restoration work in the Avon Valley.

5 Corporate Plan

Commoning Review (C1)

- An open meeting was held at Lyndhurst Community Centre for all commoners to hear about and add any final views to the Commoning Review Group's report. This was followed by a special event for young commoners to input their views. The report from the commoning review will be published at the next Verderers' Court on 18 September 2007.

New Forest: Life in Common (C3)

- The first Stakeholder meeting for the Landscape Partnership was held in August, with positive feedback. The Landscape Partnership Board has been extended to recognise the wider New Forest community - Peter Sopowski (of Ashurst and Colbury) was voted onto the Board by the Consultative Panel at its July meeting and Chris Tews joins the Board as a community representative.

The Partnership project hosted a stand at the New Forest Show, which enabled people to give feedback on potential projects. A contractor has now been appointed to produce an Audience Development Plan – one of the key documents for the bid. The process of developing project ideas into full proposals is now underway.

Nature Conservation (C3)

- A second meeting of the Biodiversity Action Plan Working Group was held to embark on scoping the plan and gaining consensus on its approach from partners. An outline of the content of the plan and proposals for vision and objectives will be drafted for the next meeting.
- Following discussions between Fawley Power Station, the National Park and the Forest Friendly Farming Adviser (Hampshire Wildlife Trust), NPower has agreed in principle to reintroduce grazing to Tom Tiddler's patch. (This is a site of nature conservation interest consisting of salt marsh, grassland and scrub located between the power station, Calshot Spit, Southampton Water and Calshot village.) The initiative should result in important benefits for nature conservation and NPower's willingness to enhance the landscape and biodiversity on their own doorstep is welcomed.

Our New Forest: A living register of language and traditions (C6)

- The project to map and record the language and cultural traditions of the National Park has started in earnest and further publicity will ask for local people to contribute their stories and knowledge in a joint project with the New Forest Centre and the Commoners' Defence Association. A local consultant, Jo Whapham will be leading the research and survey which should be completed by March 2008.

Lymington Harbour (C2)

- The Authority has received an Environmental Impact Assessment scoping request for proposals to protect Lymington Harbour using new breakwaters. The Authority has responded to the scoping consultation including raising the issue of the need to consider the impacts on marine archaeology.

The Harbour Commissioners expect to produce an Environmental Statement for the proposals in the autumn and would like works to start in spring 2008. Development will be subject to the scheme passing various environmental assessments and gaining marine consents. Due to the Harbour Authority's permitted development rights the National Park Authority has only a limited planning role.

Steve Trotter and Chris Gregory met key staff from Wightlink Ferries in early September to discuss any potential environmental and traffic impacts arising from the new ferries. A note for members will be circulated shortly.

Sustainable Development Fund (SE1)

Three projects were approved for funding from the Sustainable Development Fund:

- **New Forest Sustainable Schools**

This project is a pilot study to trial a new method of helping schools become more sustainable. It will build on the sustainability practices and experiences of Minstead Study Centre to support schools in making positive changes.

- **Rags to Witches**

This project is to create an engaging touring theatre performance that incorporates important messages about sustainability and environmental care and respect. Set in the New Forest, the production takes inspiration from the culture and folklore of the area and explores our connection with the natural world.

- **Priestlands Walled Garden Project**

This project is to further develop a walled garden that is being created at Priestlands School by expanding the reach of it to involve more students and tying it into the curriculum so that it becomes a mainstream learning resource. Through New Forest National Park Authority involvement in the project students will increase their understanding and appreciation of their local environment and the New Forest.

Claire Gingell and Stephen Trotter attended the Sustainable Development Officers Working Group meeting in the Peak District to discuss a range of issues including: evaluation of the Fund nationally; securing continued funding from Defra; and corporate sustainability in National Park authorities.

Jointly with the Forestry Commission, a visit was organised for the Committee for Rural Hampshire to look at and discuss a wide range of issues in the New Forest including forestry, woodland management and the pressures affecting commoning.

Countryside Access (U7)

- Staff briefed a sub-group of the Access Forum on the current national consultation on the proposals for improving access to the coast. Staff also met the officer responsible for drafting Wiltshire's Rights of Way Improvement Plan to discuss how the draft Plan will be prepared and how the Authority will be involved.
- An extra meeting was arranged for the Access Forum to discuss the national consultation on the proposed new 'Right to Apply' for changes to the rights of way network.
- Staff attended a meeting to learn about Hampshire County Council's audit of coastal access – how the process has been undertaken, what information has been gathered, and possibilities for filling the remaining gaps in knowledge.

Landscape (C2)

- Advice has been given on the landscape effects of the surfacing of two proposed footpaths at Linwood Bog and Beaulieu.
- A Landscape Checklist for New Development (written collectively by the Hampshire Local Government Landscape Group) has now been made available on the Authority website within the planning section.

New Forest Tour (U2)

- The Tour closed on 2 September. The weather has had an impact on numbers this year but the most recent passenger figures are looking more promising for August. A review of the year will be presented to members in the near future.

Information and Visitor Services

6 Corporate Plan

- Work started on the fourth edition of the Authority's newsletter, *Park Life*, for publication and distribution in October. **(A1, U3)**
- This year's New Forest Show stand was widely considered to be informative and entertaining. Some 2,480 people visited the stand over the three days in spite of appalling conditions on the ground. **(U3)**
- The short introductory film about the National Park, *A Special Place*, was completed and used first at the Show. Subsequently it will be used in presentations, talks and on the website. **(U3, U4)**

- The website was improved with new material about access, caring for the Forest, other national parks and Freedom of Information among other topics. A 'speaking pages' feature was added to help those with sight or reading difficulties. **(A1, U3)**
- The education Fun Zone has been completed and launched. **(U4)**
- Plans to install boundary markers and reduce sign clutter are progressing following approval of papers at the last Authority meeting. We hope to install an initial batch of markers in September, though there is a range of hurdles yet to be overcome including establishing the location of "services" in the ground. **(U3)**
- The goshawk and hobby webcam project at the Reptile Centre has proved very popular with visitors (nearly 15,000 visitors by mid August). We are already in discussion with partners about next year. **(U3)**
- The pilot programme of guided walks continues to be successful and the two-day Marine Medley event at Lepe Country Park enabled interaction with a wide cross-section of people. **(U3)**
- The design phase of the four Awareness Panels is complete and we expect to install them at a wide range of visitor sites around and within the National Park. **(U3)**

7 Partnership working

- A picnic event for disadvantaged youngsters was organised jointly with the Forestry Commission to celebrate National Parks' Week in July. It received positive media coverage. **(C2)**
- Joint work started with the Forestry Commission to feature the National Park extensively in the 2008 edition of their visitor and resident newspaper *Forest Focus*. **(A1, C2, U3)**
- The National Park Authority awarded two bonus prizes as part of the Forestry Commission's *Positive Image '07* photography competition for the images that best illustrated some of the Park's special qualities. The winning pictures will be on display at the New Forest Centre in early September and later at Moors Valley Country Park. **(C2, U3)**
- To raise awareness of the danger of animal accidents, we are soon to provide the Agisters with portable temporary signs informing motorists that a casualty has occurred at that location in the last week. **(U3)**

- The Executive Management Group set up to manage the association between the National Park Authority and the Ninth Centenary Trust over the New Forest Centre has started work. The Centre Manager's appointment and free entry for children were announced through the media and plans are being developed to re-brand the Centre. The map game used on the Authority's New Forest Show stand is being donated to the Centre on a 'long loan'. **(U3)**
- Staff hosted an all day briefing visit for the Regional Director and Deputy Director of Housing and Planning from the Government Office for the South East, together with the newly appointed Executive Director for Sustainable Prosperity from SEEDA (South East England Regional Development Agency). This is part of a programme to raise awareness of the National Park with key regional players and explore the scope for stronger partnership working.

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. It was an especially busy period for press calls with many queries relating to subjects such as the expansion of Bournemouth Airport, the proposed increase in airspace over the National Park, National Parks' Week, and foot and mouth disease. **(A1, U3)**

Planning Policy

9 Corporate Plan

Spatial planning policies (A4):

- The National Park Authority has now adopted the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Core Strategy following the Authority meeting on 28 June. This is the first minerals and waste document to be adopted nationally under the new planning system and follows the examination in public held earlier in 2007. Hampshire County, Portsmouth City and Southampton City Councils – the joint partners in the production of the document – will be adopting the Core Strategy shortly.
- Linked to the identification of new sites for minerals and waste development, staff from Hampshire County Council met Authority staff and members to discuss the various options for future development. This includes sites in the Avon Valley and the New Milton area that are immediately adjacent to the National Park boundary. The Authority has an important role to play in identifying preferred sites.

- Staff have been liaising with Hampshire County, Southampton City and Portsmouth City Councils in preparing the Minerals Plan Development Plan Document Preferred Options. This document sets out the joint authorities' draft latest thinking in relation to delivering the minerals requirements of the Core Strategy through site allocations. The discussion focussed on the impacts of development and the potential benefits that could be achieved through restoration schemes (e.g. green infrastructure, back up grazing, habitat recreation). Following discussions between the Authority and Hampshire County Council, the preferred options document takes account of the impacts on development on the National Park from sites adjacent to the boundary. Members will consider the document as a separate item on the Agenda.
- The National Park Authority and New Forest District Council are working with consultants (Halcrow) on finalising the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for the New Forest. This will inform the Local Development Framework.
- A workshop was held on 21 August at South Efford House for members to agree the broad policy options for consultation on the National Park Management Plan and the Core Strategy. Consultations will take place over the next few months.
- The Inspectors' Report into the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East was published on 29 August. The Panel recommends a 10% increase in the strategic housing requirement across the region to 32,000 dwellings per annum. However, the Panel recommends that the housing requirements for the South Hampshire sub-region and New Forest District remain unaltered. The Panel broadly supports the approach to the New Forest National Park taken in the Plan, with some amendments recommended to recognise the specific character of the New Forest, to provide a positive message on suitably located small scale proposals, and to make its setting a material planning consideration given the "...acute pressures of urbanisation in the area". The Government will now consider this Report and decide it's proposed changes. These are expected to be published in late 2007 or early 2008.

10 Other Work

- The Authority has been invited to participate in the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) Rural Excellence Programme looking at the delivery of rural affordable housing. Although the National Park Authority is not a housing authority, the programme is also examining the role of the planning process in delivering rural affordable housing.

- The Authority has now responded formally to the National Air Traffic Services proposals to allow commercial aircraft to fly at low levels as they descend into Bournemouth and Southampton airports over some of the tranquil areas in the north of the National Park. The Authority has liaised with the Council for National Parks, New Forest District Council, the Forestry Commission, the New Forest Association and a number of local parish councils in responding, and gave a presentation to the New Forest Consultative Panel on 5 July to raise awareness locally of the proposals. The Authority commissioned specialist advice on the noise impacts of the proposed routes on the National Park to inform the response.
- Notwithstanding the Authority's and Council for National Parks' representations to the Government Office for the South West, the Secretary of State has decided not to call in the Bournemouth Airport application. The Authority has now sought legal advice on the apparent breach of the Section 62 requirement by Christchurch Borough Council. Following an approach from the Airport operators, Authority officers will be meeting senior staff there to discuss the proposals in the Airport's Masterplan, and the impacts on the New Forest National Park. Potential forms of mitigation from the impacts of airport growth on the National Park will be explored.
- Staff from the Planning and Conservation Directorates attended the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) workshop on the emerging Green Infrastructure Strategy for the sub-region. Concerns have been expressed that this work needs to identify specific sites for new and enhanced green infrastructure provision to meet the needs arising from proposed development in the sub-region, the requirements of the Habitats Regulations, and as a response to climate change. A draft Research Report has been published and the Authority will comment on this.
- Officers from the team joined Salisbury District staff at their Core Strategy public consultation event held in Downton during August. This event formed part of Salisbury District Council's Core Strategy issues and options consultation process.

11 Development Control

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

Planning applications: received 112. Applications were registered within two to three working days following receipt.

Planning decisions: 110 issued, of which 99 were approved (90%) and 11 were refused (10%). Five applications were withdrawn. 12 (11%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 19 June.

81% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 78% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

Live planning applications: 335 at 30 June, compared with 337 at 31 May.

Appeals: Six new appeals received in June. Of the 10 appeal decisions in June, five were allowed, one was allowed in part and four were dismissed.

Enforcement: 43 new enforcement cases were registered in June and 69 cases were closed. Two enforcement notices were issued and there remain just under 300 outstanding enforcement cases.

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

Planning applications: received 133. Applications were registered within two to three working days following receipt.

Planning decisions: 103 issued, of which 80 were approved (78%) and 23 were refused (22%). Six applications were withdrawn. 11 (11%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 17 July.

74% 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: 361 at 31 July, compared with 335 at 30 June.

Appeals: Seven new appeals received in July. Of the two appeal decisions in July, one was allowed and one was dismissed.

Enforcement: 48 new enforcement cases were registered in July and 39 cases were closed. Two enforcement notices were issued and there remain just under 300 outstanding enforcement cases.

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

Planning applications: received 138. Applications were registered within two to three working days following receipt.

Planning decisions: 131 issued, of which 107 were approved (81%) and 24 were refused (19%). Three applications were withdrawn. Eight (6%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 21 August.

78% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 70% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

Live planning applications: 364 at 31 August, compared with 361 at 31 July.

Appeals: Six new appeals received in August. Of the eight appeal decisions in August, five were allowed and three were dismissed.

Enforcement: 42 new enforcement cases were registered in August and 60 cases were closed. Two enforcement notices were issued and there remain just under 300 outstanding enforcement cases.

12 Environmental Design

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.

During **June** the Environmental Design team carried out the following work:

- The team was consulted by Development Control on 45 applications during June. 26 consultations were returned within the 14 day target, the rest are still live (**Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7**).
- 16 tree work applications were registered during June and 12 determined. During June 100% were determined within the 8 week target date.
- Three new Tree Preservation Orders were made in June.
- A meeting of the Association of National Parks Authorities Tree and Woodland Officer Group will be hosted by the New Forest National Park Authority Tree Officers over 3 days 26 to 28 September 2007.

During **July** the Environmental Design team carried out the following work:

- The team was consulted by Development Control on 54 applications during July, 37 consultations were returned within the 14 day target, 2 were outside the target date and 15 are still live. (**Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7**)

- Consultants have now been commissioned to undertake a review of conservation areas in the National Park as set out in **Corporate Plan at C7**.

- Work commenced in July, to the following programme:

July – October 2007 - Survey of areas

November 2007 - Production of draft appraisals of areas

December 2007 – Public consultation on proposals

January 2008 – Report to National Park Authority on proposals

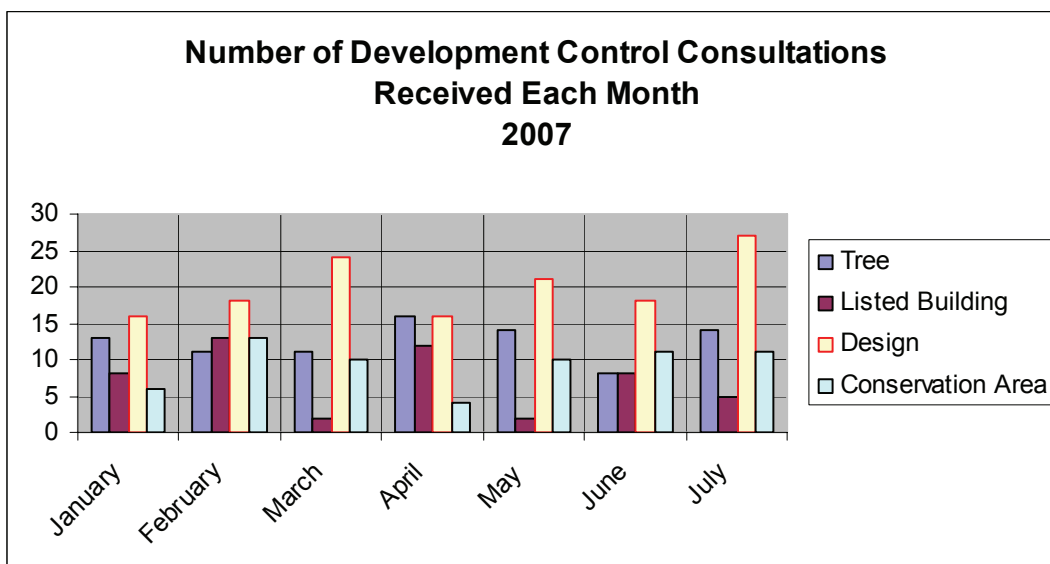
February 2008 – Final appraisals and designation.

The first area to be surveyed is Forest South East around the parishes of Boldre, East Boldre and surrounding area.

- 16 tree work applications were registered during July and 7 determined within the 8 week target date.
- Four new Tree Preservation Orders were made in July.

During **August** the Environmental Design team carried out the following work:

- The team was consulted by Development Control on 57 applications during August, 32 consultations were returned within the 14 day target, 4 were outside the target date and 21 are still live. (**Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7**)



- Consultants are progressing well with the review of conservation areas in the National Park as set out in **Corporate Plan Objective C7**. The first area to be surveyed was Forest South East around parishes.

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 (including two Tree Preservation Order Objection Panel meetings since the last Authority meeting).
- Other work undertaken by the section included monitoring complaints and Freedom of Information requests received by the Authority. The section also provides support to the New Forest Consultative Panel and, in addition to arranging and supporting meetings of the Panel, has begun updating the Panel handbook and leaflet. In addition, the section has arranged for the attendance of staff and officers at the ANPA conference later this month.
- Member Services has identified dates in 2008 for meetings of the Authority and its committees, and has provisionally booked venues where appropriate. The training programme for members has been completed and is being rolled out. The section has also conducted and analysed the results of a members' survey on the provision of ICT facilities by the Authority.
- Member Services has assisted in getting the approved Freedom of Information Publication Scheme, with all relevant links, onto the Authority's website. Other amendments to the website included updating the members' pages in line with the new appointments. The section is updating the members' yearbook, revised pages for which will be distributed to members shortly.

Corporate services

14 Human Resources

- The Authority currently is maintaining an extremely low level of sickness absence at less than two days per employee per year.
- The work on the Disability impact assessments is now completed. The Disability Equality Strategy was presented to Resources and Performance Committee on 28 August and is on the agenda for final approval by the Authority prior to publication.
- A ballot of all Authority staff voted for formal Unison recognition for the purposes of negotiation and consultation. This will enable the Authority to meet the requirements of The information and Consultation of Employees Regulations 2004 when they apply to the Authority in April 2008.

- Discussions are underway with Unison officials to agree a timescale for the completion of staffside consultation on the suite of the Authority's draft policies.
- As of 31 August the Authority has 66 staff, of whom 10 are part time, 11 are on time limited contracts and one is externally funded. There are three vacancies in the Planning Directorate, two of which are close to appointment, one of which is for a fixed term.

Tony Hugget, principal planner, retired from the Authority in July and Helen Bonds joined us as PA to Chief Executive and Chairman on 30 July. The Authority has appointed Mark Stephenson as Building Conservation Officer. He will join the Authority in October.

15 ICT

- Software systems that protect the Authority and its staff from unsolicited 'spam' email has intercepted nearly 7,500 mails almost 47 percent of the total inbound volume in July, a doubling of the rate in the previous month.
- The Authority's Geographical Information Officer has developed an electronic key map for the Verderers' Atlas of common rights based on the old rather fragile paper map, the results of which were used by the Verderers at the New Forest Show.
- The Authority is exploring the use of three dimensional mapping which will be able to represent topographical detail in an easily accessible format.

16 Finance and Performance

- The annual external audit of the Authority is being carried out by Audit Commission again this year, and initial on-site work was completed in August.
- Discussions with Defra on Authority funding have identified errors in the application of the formula to calculate the Authority's core grant, resulting in a shortfall of around £130,000. Defra has undertaken to correct the shortfall for 2007/08. Work continues on the appropriate level of funding for the Authority for the Spending Review Period (2008/09 – 2010/11) with the aim of a submission to Defra in mid-September.
- The Authority has been provisionally awarded a Planning Delivery Grant of £125,000 for 2007/08. This is the last time the grant will be available from the Department for Communities and Local Government.

17 Accommodation

- The negotiations for extending the lease for South Efford House up to 2010 are in the final stages and an application to extend to the Authority's temporary planning permission will be made in September. Significant progress has been made with the Defra project on securing permanent headquarters for the Authority, the first phase of which should conclude in the autumn.

Recommendation

To note the report.