

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

CORPORATE PLAN 2007– 2008

Our Mission

The New Forest National Park Authority, shortly after it was established in April 2005, set out its mission:

“We pledge to conserve and enhance the Forest’s unique beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and to inspire everyone to respect, understand and enjoy it. Working with partners, we will actively encourage all those who live, work and visit here to care for the Forest into the future.”

Our Values

- Enthusiasm** We are passionate about the New Forest and dedicated to achieving national park purposes with energy and enthusiasm
- Achievement** Making a difference will be at the heart of everything we do; we will take the long view and respect for people and the environment will guide everything we do; we will be innovative, strive for continuous improvement and take pride in our achievements
- Integrity** We will be honest, objective, fair and diligent in our work; make decisions based on the best available evidence; and be personally accountable for what we do and collectively responsible as an organisation for our decisions and actions
- Openness** We will encourage, listen to and respect each other’s and other people’s views and contributions, freely share our knowledge and information, be clear in what we say and be open to fresh ideas and adaptable
- Teamwork** Strong leadership and teamwork will be the hallmark of the way we work together and with our partners
- Care** We value our staff and colleagues. We will care for the well-being of our staff and will invest in and develop their potential so that can all enjoy our work. We will treat each other, our partners and the public with courtesy and consideration and will provide a helpful, high quality and efficient service

About this Plan

This is the second Corporate Plan for the New Forest National Park Authority. It is written in compliance with government's current "Best Value"¹ requirements. It describes what and who we are, rolls forward last year's Plan and explains what we have done and what we plan to do in our second full year to safeguard the New Forest National Park for the future.

The Plan explains:

- The role of the National Park Authority
- Our aim
- Our objectives
- Our actions to deliver our objectives and the targets we have set for completing them
- How much our work will cost
- How and when we will review our progress and performance
- What we achieved in our first full year and what we aim to achieve in our second year.

The Plan is for:

- Members and staff of the National Park Authority
- The Government and our Auditors, who will monitor and assess the effectiveness of our work
- Our partner organisations, who help to deliver national park purposes through their own work
- Anyone who is interested in finding out about our work.

How to Contact Us

We would very much welcome your view and comments on this Plan or any other aspect of the Authority's performance or services. You can do so by:

- Writing to:
Lindsay Cornish (Chief Executive)
New Forest National Park Authority
South Efford House, Milford Road
Everton, Lymington
Hampshire, SO41 0JD
Tel: 01590 646633 Fax: 01590 646606
- Email: lindsay.cornish@newforestnpa.gov.uk

If you would like to receive further copies of the Plan or any other documents mentioned in the Plan, you can do so by writing to Martin O'Neill or emailing enquiries@newforestnpa.gov.uk

Space limits what we can include in this document. However, you can visit the New Forest National Park Authority's website www.newforestnpa.gov.uk where, among other things, you will find information about:

- The National Park
- The National Park Authority
- Events and visitor information
- News releases and publications
- Planning

This Corporate Plan is available on CD, in large-print format or Braille on request using the contact details given above.

¹ *Local Government Act 1999, ODPM Circular 10/2003
New arrangements will apply from 2008/09*

Contents

Foreword

Setting the scene

- The New Forest National Park
- The National Park's special qualities
- The New Forest National Park Authority
 - Legal framework and remit
 - Organisation and funding
 - The Authority's strategies and plans
- Our priorities
 - The Authority's aim
 - Priorities from the interim National Park Management Plan
 - Defra's priorities
 - Setting the Authority's priorities and objectives
 - Priority objectives for the Authority's work in 2007-2008 and beyond
- Improving our services
- Partnership working

Performance

- Financial summary
- Delivering our aim and objectives
 - Champion the New Forest National Park working in partnership through co-ordinated and innovative policies and actions
 - Conserve and enhance the unique environment of the New Forest National Park and in particular the special qualities of its landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage
 - Encourage everyone to understand and enjoy the New Forest National Park's special qualities while ensuring that its character is not harmed
 - Support the social and economic well-being of local communities in ways that sustain the New Forest National Park's special character

Appendices

- Appendix 1 New Forest National Park profile 2007-2008
- Appendix 2 Members and organisational structure
- Appendix 3 Financial summary
- Appendix 4 Performance indicators

Foreword

Setting the Scene

The New Forest National Park

The New Forest has a long and proud history, a strong foundation for the National Park. One of the most significant events was the establishment by William the Conqueror of the New Forest as a royal hunting ground in 1079. The practice of commoning and the system of common rights developed from medieval times or earlier and were formalised by the end of the 17th century. Although some of these rights are no longer practised, the rights of pasture (for ponies and cattle) and pannage (the foraging of pigs) are still very important and are protected by the New Forest Acts administered by the New Forest Court of Verderers. There are around 560 active commoners living in and around the Forest today.

In 1923, the Forestry Commission was made responsible for the management of the Crown Lands in the New Forest. These cover 25,825 hectares, 47% of the National Park. The New Forest Heritage Area was identified in 1985 and special planning policies were adopted to protect it. Five years later, in 1990, the New Forest Committee was established with the primary purpose of promoting and co-ordinating measures to ensure the conservation of the Heritage Area.

In October 1999, the Countryside Agency began the process of designating the New Forest as a National Park. A public inquiry took place in 2003. Designation as a National Park was confirmed on 1 March 2005. The boundary was modified slightly in 2006-2007 to exclude the Fawley Power Station and a small tract of land in the south west around Hinton. A profile of the New Forest National Park appears in **Appendix 1**.

The National Park's special qualities

The National Park landscape is unique; it is a 'living' and working remnant of medieval England with an overwhelming sense of continuity, tradition, and history. It is the survival of not just one special quality but a whole range of features that brings a sense of completeness and integrity.

These features include:

- the New Forest's outstanding natural beauty: the sights, sounds and smells of ancient woodland, heather-covered heath, unspoilt coastline with views of the Isle of Wight and the Solent, autumn colour
- an extraordinary diversity of plants and animals of international importance including wild deer, rare birds and reptiles
- a unique historic and cultural heritage from royal hunting ground to ship-building and strong local communities with distinct character
- commoning and a historic grazing system that maintains so much of what people know and love as 'the New Forest'
- the iconic New Forest Pony together with donkeys, pigs and cattle roaming free
- wonderful opportunities for quiet recreation, learning and discovery in one of the last extensive, gentle landscapes in the south including unmatched open access to ancient woodlands
- a healthy environment: fresh air, clean water, local produce, tranquillity, a sense of 'wildness', low levels of urbanisation
- interesting literary, artistic and scientific connections

The New Forest National Park Authority

Legal framework and remit

The National Park Authority's role is to ensure that the two purposes of national park designation are achieved, in other words to act as the National Park's guardian. These purposes, common to all national parks, are:

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park; and
- to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the Park's special qualities by the public.

In doing this, the Authority is also required to:

- seek to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities within the National Park.

The National Park Authority is a freestanding organisation, created under powers in the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act and the 1995 Environment Act, operating in a local government framework.

The National Park Authority was formally established on 1 April 2005 and took on its full statutory powers and responsibilities on 1 April 2006 as the:

- local planning authority, responsible for spatial planning, minerals and waste planning, development control and enforcement and other related regulatory functions within the National Park;
- access authority and relevant authority for the National Park under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, dealing for example, with applications for restrictions and closures. The Authority has also taken on joint responsibility for the New Forest Access Forum, in partnership with Hampshire County Council;

It is required to:

- produce a Management Plan for the National Park; and
- administer a Sustainable Development Fund.

Apart from its statutory functions, the National Park Authority has wide powers to take forward the twin purposes of the National Park.

Organisation and funding

The Authority's 22 members have overall responsibility for making decisions, setting the strategic direction, policies and priorities for the National Park and ensuring efficient and effective use of resources. They act in the interests the National Park as a whole, reflecting both national and local perspectives. The membership, staff and Committee structure are summarised in **Appendix 2**.

The Authority's funding comes from central government (Defra) rather than local taxpayers. This reflects the fact that unlike local councils our responsibilities extend well beyond our boundaries as we are working with others to look after the National Park for the whole nation.

The Authority's strategies and plans

The Strategy for the New Forest was drawn up by the New Forest Committee in partnership with stakeholders in 2003. It was adopted by the National Park Authority as the **interim New Forest National Park Management Plan** and provides the policy framework that guides the work of the National Park Authority and partner organisations until the new Management Plan is agreed. The Strategy for the New Forest can be viewed in local libraries and on the publications section of the Authority website www.newforestnpa.gov.uk. Work on drawing up the new Management Plan has begun, with the aim of completing it early in 2009. There will be many opportunities for all those with an interest in the National Park to comment on the draft Management Plan before it is formally adopted by the Authority.

The Management Plan is for the National Park as a whole and all those with a stake in it, not just for the National Park Authority. It is intended to provide the long term strategic policy framework for the National Park and to guide the work of the Authority and all the other organisations that contribute to the delivery of the national park purposes. The Authority, in taking forward national park purposes, will be working with a wide range of partners and stakeholders.

Each year, the Authority publishes a **Corporate Plan** in which it sets out how it will achieve its objectives and how it has measured up to the targets it set itself the previous year. The relationship between the interim Management Plan, the Corporate Plan, other strategies and plans, and government policy is illustrated in the diagram on the next page.

The next Best Value Performance Plan will be re-structured, both to reflect new government guidance on the framework for such plans and also to include information on the Authority's performance management processes and how they fit into the corporate planning framework.

Our priorities

The Authority's aim

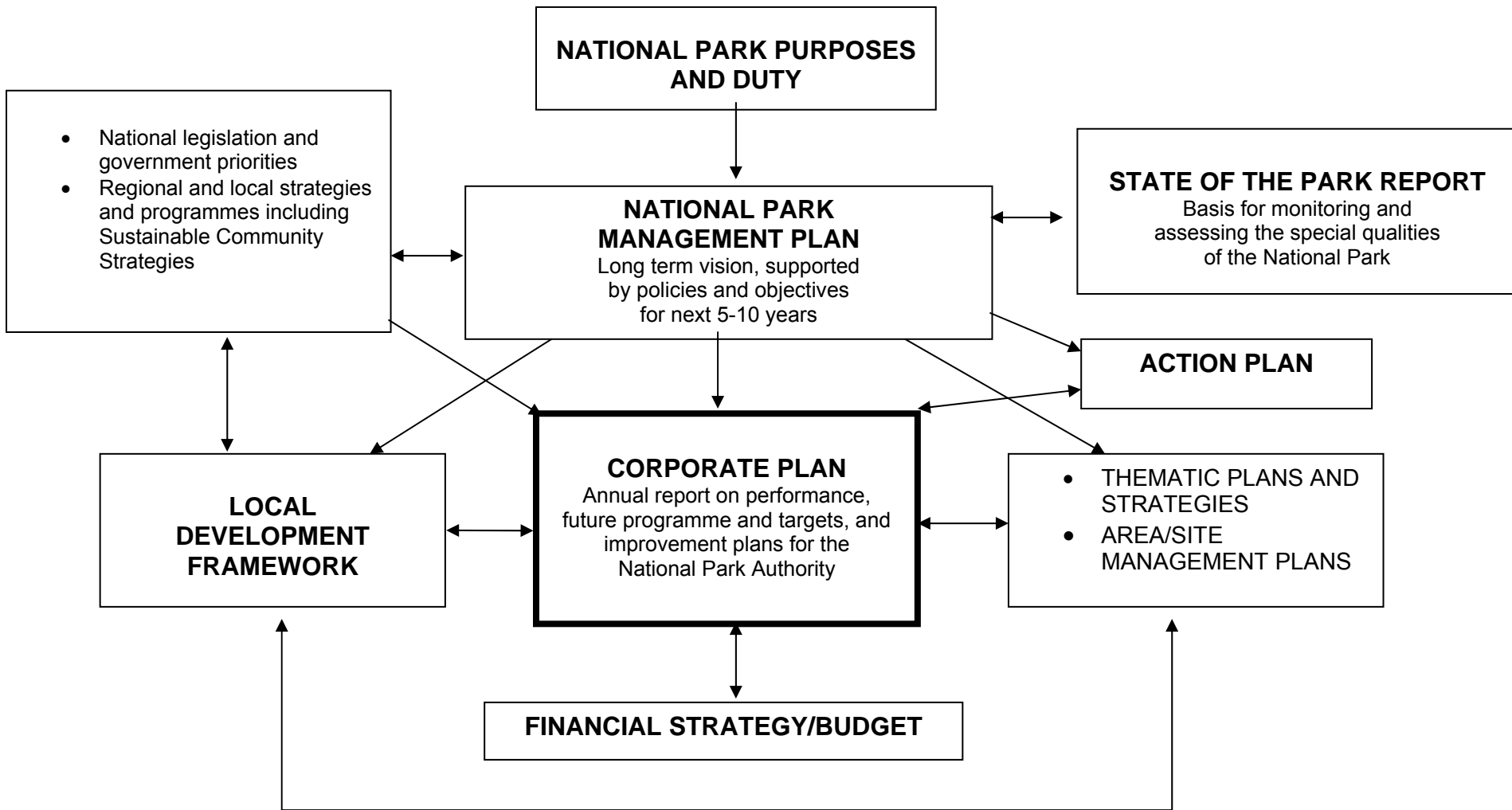
The Vision for the New Forest in Chapter 1 of the New Forest Strategy describes what the New Forest will be like in fifty years if we and others are successful in achieving our responsibility as its guardians. The National Park Authority will take a leading role in ensuring the vision is achieved. We have therefore set ourselves the following aim to underpin our mission statement:

The New Forest National Park Authority will champion the New Forest National Park, working in partnership through co-ordinated and innovative policies and actions, which:

- conserve and enhance the unique environment of the National Park, and in particular the special qualities of its landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage;
- encourage everyone to understand and enjoy the National Park's special qualities, while ensuring that its character is not harmed; and
- support the social and economic well-being of local communities in ways that sustain the National Park's special character.

Priorities from the interim National Park Management Plan

After the Strategy was published in 2003, all those who had helped to produce it were sent a questionnaire asking them which proposals they thought were the most important and urgent. The responses to the questionnaire were used to score each proposal and the highest-scoring proposals were used as the basis of much of the Authority's work last year on selecting its priorities.



Defra's priorities

The Government also sets priorities for National Parks, in consultation with the Countryside Agency and the National Park Authorities. These highlight the areas on which the Government particularly expects progress to be made in the period 2005-2006 to 2007-2008:

- a promoting the principles of sustainable development
- b implementing the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
- c promoting understanding and greater use by all especially people with disabilities, from ethnic minorities and inner cities, and young people
- d enhancing recreational activities and fulfilling the commitments made in the Health Concordat 2005
- e promoting wildlife conservation and cultural heritage by:
 - contributing to bringing Sites of Special Scientific Interest into favourable condition
 - contributing to reversing the decline in farmland birds, achieving the England Biodiversity Strategy and UK Biodiversity Action Plan targets
 - engaging with partners and the public in the appreciation and care of the Parks' cultural heritage
 - contributing to the review of Heritage protection by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport
- f working with others to:
 - support sustainable rural development projects
 - add value by providing targeted support for projects and schemes
 - develop and promote other sources of funding e.g. Lottery schemes; and
 - work with authorities responsible for administering Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- g developing State of the Park Indicators
- h working with Defra and others to implement the Rural Strategy 2004, including the creation of an effective Natural England
- i improving the Authority's performance and service delivery.

A fuller description of these priorities can be found at:
www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/issues/landscap/funding-priorities.htm

Setting the Authority's priorities

In the autumn of 2005 members attended a series of workshops, at which they considered their overall priorities for the National Park and some possible proposals for action in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. The workshops took the interim Management Plan as their starting point. The output from the workshops was synthesised into summaries for each of the proposals that were voted by members as among their top priorities. After consideration by the full Authority in November 2005, the priorities were used as the basis for consultation with stakeholders.

Early in 2006 members participated in Task and Finish Groups to develop the actions to underpin the proposals and to score them, taking into account each proposal's contribution to:

- the National Park purposes and duty
- the priorities from the interim Management Plan
- the Defra priorities; and
- other proposals and initiatives

as well as the:

- level of stakeholder support
- impact on public perception of the National Park
- level of urgency/risk if the work was not undertaken;

and

- added value and value for money.

At the end of this process, the Authority had refined its priorities and proposals – the latter thus becoming its priority objectives for its work over the next two years. These were grouped under the four components of the Authority's aim and are shown on the next page. Each set of objectives, other than the corporate ones, is ranked in line with the members' scores.

No changes have been made to the Authority's priorities this year. A full review of priorities will be carried out in autumn 2008 to reflect changes arising from progress in finalising the new National Park Management Plan.

Priority objectives for the Authority's work in 2007-2008 and beyond

A Champion the New Forest National Park, working in partnership through co-ordinated and innovative policies and actions

A1 Build the new Authority

A2 Work with and through partners to achieve the Vision for the National Park and national park purposes

A3 Provide a clear, up-to-date framework for the management of the New Forest National Park by working with partners to review and replace the interim Management Plan

A4 Develop spatial planning policies to support the delivery of the national park purposes and duty, working jointly with constituent authorities

A5 Provide a development control service and consultation process that helps to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the National Park, while supporting appropriate opportunities for economic and community development

A6 Ensure that statutory and other relevant bodies' Section 62 responsibilities are fully recognised and delivered in both the South East and relevant parts of the South West region

C Conserve and enhance the unique environment of the New Forest National Park and in particular the special qualities of its landscape and cultural heritage

C1 Develop strategies and support schemes to help sustain agriculture and promote thriving commoning activity that is in keeping with the New Forest National Park

C2 Conserve, restore or recreate landscapes, and their component parts, which reflect the special qualities of the National Park

C3 Conserve and enhance the nature conservation value of the New Forest National Park

C4 Promote local cultural traditions and local products
(This objective and the actions to support it have now been included in Objective 6 (see below) and Objective SE1 (see over-leaf))

C5 Work with relevant authorities to minimise the impacts of air, noise, water and light pollution on the special qualities of the National Park

C6 Strengthen protection, understanding and management of the historic, archaeological and cultural aspects of the National Park's landscape

C7 Support high quality building and open space design in village and town centres, reflecting the distinctive character of the built environment

C8 Co-ordinate a review of the likely impacts of climate change on the whole of the National Park and develop long term strategies to address these impacts

U Encourage everyone to understand and enjoying the National Park's special qualities, while ensuring that its character is not harmed

U1 Produce a recreation and visitor management strategy to cover the National Park and surrounding areas

U2 Review strategies and develop proposals to reduce the impact of traffic on the special qualities 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

U4 Prepare and implement a co-ordinated programme for education about the National Park, which emphasises environmental and sustainability issues

U5 Develop a co-ordinated National Park ranger service, working with relevant partner organisations to build on existing services

U6 Enhance opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding, including developing an integrated network of accessible, safe and attractive footpath and cycle routes, and promote their use to local people and visitors

U7 Improve public access through implementation of the National Park Authority's responsibilities under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

(Mainstream activity – no longer reported as a separate Corporate Plan Objective)

SE Support the social and economic well-being of local communities in ways that sustain the New Forest National Park's special character

SE1 Promote sustainable development within the National Park as the basis for the social and economic well-being of local communities

SE2 Protect the existing affordable housing stock, and help increase the number of affordable houses for rent and shared ownership

SE3 Support existing and encourage new businesses and community services which enhance the Forest environment while providing economic and community benefits

Improving our services

As a new authority it is very important that we review how effectively we are delivering our services with the aim of improving both their quality and cost-effectiveness.

2006/2007

In the last year our main efforts have focused on completing the development or installation of systems and software to enable us to operate as efficiently as possible and in embedding those systems or procedures into our daily work. We also sought to complete the outstanding components of the Corporate Governance framework identified by the Audit Commission in its Annual [Inspection] letter.

We have also monitored our performance in key areas of our work, such as planning development control and enforcement, and have seen steadily improving progress in achieving statutory targets so that by the fourth quarter of our first year we were consistently meeting two of the three Best Value targets for Development Control (see **Appendix 4**). We nevertheless commissioned a review of the administrative functions supporting our development control work at the end of 2006, facilitated by external consultants, and as a result have introduced a number of changes which have also improved our efficiency in this area.

Towards the end of the year we have started to seek customer feedback in some areas of the Authority's work, such as our formal public meetings, and more feedback from other areas of work is planned for 2007/2008.

The Authority completed the first stage in seeking to achieve Investors in People (IiP) status and secured a grant from Quality South East to start the process.

The Authority has not awarded any individual contracts during the year that involve a transfer of staff.

The Audit Commission has reviewed the Best Value Performance Plan elements of our Corporate Plan 2006-07 and did not identify any matters to be reported to the Authority and did not make any recommendations on procedures in relation to the Best Value Performance Plan elements of the Corporate Plan 2006-2007.

2007/2008

In the first half of 2007/2008 we plan to complete a '*fitness for purpose*' review which will be a modified version of the National Park Authorities' Performance Assessment process (Comprehensive Performance Assessment). The main aim will be to take stock of the Authority's development and identify any gaps or areas for improvement after just over 12 months as a fully operational organisation. The work will include self-assessment and a peer review process (involving senior officers and members from other national park authorities and local authorities) facilitated by consultants.

Involving others

Ensuring the delivery of national park objectives is crucially dependent on the Authority working successfully through and influencing others. For this reason partnership working is set out as a specific objective in this Plan.

The action we took in 2006/2007 is set out mainly in Sections A2 and A3 of the Performance Section of this Plan. We will build on this in 2007/2008.

Performance

Financial Summary

The Authority's main source of funding is an annual grant from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). For 2007-2008 the grant is set at £3,714,000, which includes £200,000 for the Sustainable Development Fund. The Authority also expects to receive around £250,000 in fees for planning and related applications, and £120,000 in interest on its reserves. The total funds available to the Authority are thus expected to be around £4,080,000, excluding sums which it handles on behalf of other organisations such as LEADER + and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

An External Funding Officer has been appointed, and there is a performance target in Appendix 4 (LPI/3) which commits the Authority to generating 100% of its direct project spend as external funding, including partnership match funding and the Sustainable Development Fund income from Defra.

Planned activity for the year is expected to cost some £4,820,000 gross and £4,426,000 net of non-Defra income sources. This is in line with the Authority's financial management strategy for the period to 2009-2010, which endorses the use of the Authority's general and specific reserves both to complete its development (since not all start-up costs have yet been met) and to develop its activity in the area of its twin purposes.

The following chart illustrates the breakdown of planned expenditure between the main service activities in 2007-2008. The figures are taken from the Authority's approved budget. The budget breakdown is shown in **Appendix 3**.

