

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**AUTHORITY MEETING – 28 FEBRUARY 2008**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

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

**Summary:**

This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 24 January 2008 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in January.

**Recommendation:**

**To note the report.**

**Resources:**

Routine

**Paper:**

**NFNPA 232/08:** Cover paper

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- 1 This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 24 January 2008 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in January.

**Members**

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

- 'New Forest, New Chapter' – Understanding and Enjoyment Topic Group, 28 January
- 'New Forest, New Chapter' – Living and Working Topic Group, 30 January
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 31 January
- 'New Forest, New Chapter' – Conservation and Enhancement Topic Group, 4 February
- Recreation Management Strategy Members' Advisory Group, 8 February
- Core Strategy Joint Member Advisory Group meeting, 11 February
- Visit to Burley workshop to learn about the production process of the National Park boundary markers, 14 February
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 19 February
- Briefing on Local Access Forum and transport issues in the New Forest, 19 February
- Standards Committee meeting, 25 February
- New Forest, New Chapter - Ward Councillor Workshop on New Forest National Park Management Plan and Core Strategy, 26 February

- 3 Forthcoming activities include:

- Members' informal briefing and discussion on proposed mineral allocation sites following the Authority meeting on 28 February
- New Forest Access Forum meeting, 3 March
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 4 March

- Consultative Panel meeting, 6 March
- Country Landowners – local estate visit, 10 March
- Members' workshop on the emerging Corporate Plan, 13 March
- 'New Forest, New Chapter' concluding workshop, 17 March
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 18 March

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

### **Conservation, Recreation and Sustainable Development**

#### **4 Partnership working**

##### **Funding**

##### **LEADER**

In January, the full application for new LEADER funding (the bid is worth £2.4 million from 2008-2013) was completed and submitted to SEEDA. The New Forest LEADER programme aims to develop the skills and infrastructure of rural businesses, particularly within the forestry and farming sectors and includes support for the development of renewable energy systems and markets. The programme will also support the provision of new and improved community facilities and services within the villages and towns in the Forest.

The outcome of the application should be known in May 2008. If successful, funding is likely to be available from autumn 2008 and will be distributed by New Forest District Council which will be the Accountable Body.

#### **5 Corporate Plan**

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

- The inaugural Landscape Strategy Meeting took place with landscape representatives from all local partner organisations.

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

- A meeting was held with the New Forest District Council Policy Planners to review responses to their Core Strategy Habitats Regulations Assessment which Authority staff helped them produce. Staff have agreed to continue our advisory role and assistance to them in producing responses to the representations. Staff are due to undertake further meetings in February with the District, Natural England and RSPB.

- Staff held the fourth Working Group meeting for the New Forest Biodiversity Action Plan. The results of the November workshop were produced and circulated to the working group and interested parties. They have also been circulated to officers to inform the Management Plan process.
- With colleagues from Planning Policy, staff attended a workshop for the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire Green Infrastructure Strategy and are undertaking their own liaison with partners concerning its proposals. Views expressed at the workshop were that the strategy does not go far enough and more detail is required to enable confidence in any implementation.

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

- Archaeological and heritage talks were given to the Brockenhurst Probus group and the Fordingbridge Historical Society.
- A meeting was held with the Lymington Harbour Master to discuss the next phase of archaeological work in advance of the proposed Lymington Harbour Protection Scheme.
- A site visit to Oakley Plantation took place, led by Anthony Pasmore, to view the newly discovered archaeological sites discovered during the woodland survey that the Authority commissioned.
- A stakeholder/partner meeting was held to outline and discuss the proposed Archaeological Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment Project. It is anticipated that the project will consist of three stages. *Stage one* will involve data assessment, preliminary out reach and education. *Stage two* would be a field work phase identifying on the ground and underwater new site locations and confirming those already known. Information for education and outreach purposes would be updated as field work progresses. *Stage three* would involve interpretation and data assessment leading to data synthesis and an overview of the archaeological resources through time. This phase would include interpretation and preparation of illustrative material for dissemination. The outcome would be an assessment of the vulnerability of coastal historic environment assets and the identification of future archaeological research and field work specifically related to the historic assets most at risk from sea level changes, coastal erosion and threats from coastal developments.

### **Traffic and transport (U2)**

- Staff, including staff from the planning policy team hosted a transport seminar on highway and landscape issues in the National Park, aimed at local higher engineers and transport planners.

Around 35 delegates attended the event opened by Mel Kendal and speakers included representatives from the Council for National Parks and Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority. The event provided an opportunity for those involved with Highway schemes in the Park to learn more about its purposes and special qualities.

### **Access (U6)**

- Staff looked at a number of stream crossings on Crown Lands with local walkers, Forestry Commission and Environment Agency to discuss potential options for improving the 'crossability' of the streams whilst keeping the impact on landscape, ecology and hydrology to a minimum.
- With Hampshire County Council, staff assessed completed applications and selected two new members of the New Forest Access Forum to represent Tourism and Disability.
- Staff met officers from Hampshire County Council and members of the Small Grants Scheme Panel to discuss improvements to and expansion of the Scheme for 2008/2009. Staff also started to plan an event for Parish Councils – primarily to inform them about the Small Grants Scheme and other information about countryside access, but also to encourage Parish Councils to take an active role in managing countryside access, and to inform the Parish Councils about wider funding opportunities.

### **Sustainable Development (SE 1)**

- Staff attended a Directors' meeting of New Forest Produce Ltd, which included discussion on future funding and development of the New Forest Marque.
- Two projects were awarded grants from the Sustainable Development Fund in January:

#### *Ashurst and Colbury Bags for the Future*

This project aims significantly to reduce the use of plastic bags within the parish of Ashurst and Colbury and to provide a catalyst for similar changes to take place elsewhere in the New Forest National Park. It has five elements:

- providing every household in the parish with an organic cotton re-usable bag,
- disseminating information about the effects of plastic bag pollution,

- linking with sustainability work being undertaken at Foxhills Junior School, providing information on the impact of plastic litter on wildlife,
- persuading retailers to provide alternative packaging,
- inspiring changes in actions and habits in communities and individuals across the New Forest.

*Widening the audience of 'Aren't Bird's Brilliant! in the New Forest'*

This project will build on the success of last years 'Aren't Bird's Brilliant! in the New Forest' project by increasing participation and attracting new audiences to the project. It comprises two elements:

- the creation of a covered interpretive entrance, designed to entice visitors to the site into the display area itself,
  - the development of an education programme for school groups, delivering sessions about the birds and reptiles of the New Forest and the issues surrounding their management.
- A meeting was held with representatives from seven Forest communities to explore ways to reduce plastic bag use – with the potential aim of becoming a 'plastic bag free' National Park.
  - The Authority's Corporate Sustainability Action Plan was approved by Resources and Performance Committee.

## Information and Visitor Services

### 6 Corporate Plan

- 200,000 more animal accident hotline cards have been printed, together with 500 desktop dispensers. These are being distributed to a wide range of outlets in and around the National Park. **(A1, U3)**
- The next 12 education factsheets are with the printers bringing the total to 16: a very significant resource for schools and colleges, but also useful in a wide range of other situations. **(U4)**
- The updated edition of the National Park *Pocket Guide* was published, distributed and publicised. **(A1, U3)**
- Orders have been placed for more timber boundary markers (for 27 roadside locations and one remaining long-distance footpath); zinc way-marker discs (for some 50 minor footpath locations) and negotiations for trunk road boundary signs (for the A36, A31 and M27) are well-advanced. **(U3)**
- Fifteen events for 2008 have been organised and are available to view on the website 'What's On' pages. **(U3)**

- Hayley Sharpe Design have been appointed to help work up designs for the proposed mobile information unit. Plans to introduce up to three pilot 'Local Information Points' in Forest villages are also progressing. It is hoped that both these initiatives will be operational this summer. **(U3)**
- Work continued on the 'Your Shout' project - engaging with young people for input into the Management Plan and to perform a short scene-setting theatre piece at the Management Plan concluding event on 17 March. A short film is also being made of the project. **(U4)**

## 7 Partnership working

- Work with the Forestry Commission to feature the National Park extensively in the 2008 edition of its visitor and resident newspaper *Forest Focus* was completed. The paper will be published in February/March. **(A1, C2, U3)**
- Agreement has been reached with the Road Safety Council for the design of a new animal accident warning sign to be recommended to the Highway Authority as a replacement for the very large shield-shaped signs located at the start of high-risk routes. This is a separate Agenda item. **(U3)**
- Work continued on detailed design and planning work with the New Forest Centre for re-branding the exterior and updating displays inside as part of the partnership arrangements between the Ninth Centenary Trust and the National Park Authority. **(U3)**
- The joint RSPB, Forestry Commission, Carnx Films and National Park 'Aren't Birds Brilliant! in the New Forest' project is set to be repeated this spring: further funding has been found to expand and broaden the audience and a project assistant has been recruited. **(U3)**
- Work progressed on a New Forest Outdoor Science Project, part-funded by the British Ecological Society. Up to six local secondary schools and one local Pupil Referral Unit are expected to take part this summer. **(U4)**

## 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. **(A1, U3)**
- January was a very busy month for media enquiries, with significant interest in stories relating to the appointment of the Official Verderer and the Civil Aviation Authority decision on airspace. **(A1)**

## Planning Policy

### 9 Corporate Plan

#### Corporate Plan Objective A3: Management Plan

- The sixth, seventh and eighth in a series of nine workshops focussing on the Management Plan, Core Strategy, and the Recreation Management Strategy took place in late January 2008. These particular topic workshops looked in further detail at developing policies for 'Living and Working', 'Understanding and Enjoyment' and 'Conservation and Enhancement'.
- A meeting of the Management Plan and Core Strategy Project Board, comprising staff members and senior managers from across the Authority, was held to discuss progress and direction of these plans.
- The Authority hosted the latest Core Strategy Members' Advisory group meeting where Authority staff, members and staff from New Forest District Council discussed the progress made on the Core Strategies of the Council and the Authority

#### Corporate Plan Objective A4: Spatial Planning Policies

- Staff attended a meeting of the Gypsy and Traveller West sub-group meeting in Romsey. This meeting involved staff from Test Valley, Eastleigh, New Forest and Southampton and focussed on the emerging requirements for additional pitches in the sub-region.
- Staff from Policy and Plans and Environmental Design met to discuss the production of the Building Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document, which would provide more detailed planning design guidance within the National Park.
- Invitations were distributed to all ward members within and immediately adjoining the National Park informing them of the workshop to be held on 26 February on the development of the Authority's Core Strategy.
- Officers wrote to the Government Office of the South West in support of the continuance of three (of four) policies in the Wiltshire and Swindon Waste Local Plan which are still in force in the National Park, but are due to expire in the summer.

### 10 Other work

- Staff attended the *Aviation in the UK* seminar held by the Sustainable Development Commission and the Institute for Public Policy Research in London on 30 January. The seminar involved

discussion of the contribution of aviation towards sustainable development, and a wide range of stakeholders attended. The Authority was able to share its views on the impacts of aviation from a protected landscapes perspective. Representatives from the Sustainable Development Commission are travelling down to meet with National Park Authority staff in early March to discuss in more detail the Authority's views on aviation.

- John Clements drafted a response to the Government's consultation on further proposed changes to the plan-making system on behalf of the English National Park Authorities Association, and circulated this for comment from National Park Policy Officers and Heads of Planning.

## 11 Development Control

During January the Development Control unit carried out the following work:

**Planning applications: received 122.** Applications were registered within three working days following receipt.

**Planning decisions: 94 issued**, of which 67 were approved (71%) and 24 were refused (26%). Five applications were withdrawn. Eleven (12%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 15 January.

76% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 74% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

**Live planning applications: 335 at 31 January**, compared with 304 at 31 December.

**Appeals: Eleven new appeals** received this month. Of the 12 appeal decisions in January, four were allowed and eight dismissed. Three appeals were withdrawn.

**Enforcement: 38 new enforcement cases** were registered in January and 35 cases were closed. There were 262 outstanding enforcement cases at the end of the month. Six enforcement notices were served during January.

## 12 Environmental Design

- The team was consulted by Development Control on 52 applications during January, 24 of which were returned within the 14 day target date. **(Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7)**

- Twenty tree work applications were registered during January and 18 determined, 94% of which within the eight week target date. Seven Tree Preservation Orders were made.
- Negotiations are continuing over a number of listed 'Buildings At Risk' including Hyde Farm barns and 'The Salterns', Lower Pennington. The 'Salterns', a pair of 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings associated with the salt trade, are a unique survival and therefore a particularly interesting site. The conservation of these buildings is involving cross section working including Development Control, Conservation Recreation and Sustainable Development and Environmental Design. **(Corporate Plan Objective C7)**
- The review of conservation areas in the National Park **(Corporate Plan Objective C7)** is progressing well. After public consultation which resulted in significant support, two new conservation areas - Forest South East, around the parishes of Boldre, East Boldre and surrounding area, and Forest Central (North and South) around the parishes of Minstead and Bramshaw, were designated at the January meeting of the National Park Authority. Public consultation on the third area to be surveyed, Forest North East which contains the settlements of Copythorne, Winsor, Woodlands and parts of Netley Marsh and Bartley took place, including a public meeting at Netley Marsh attended by some 120 people, where all were in support of the proposal. Consultants completed surveying the Avon Valley area and public consultation will take place in early February.
- Work is continuing on the preparation of a draft Building Design Guide, for consultation later in the year. **(Corporate Plan Objective A4)**
- Work has started on a project to identify the ancient/veteran tree resource in the Park to formulate methods for future strategic management of the resource and engagement with stakeholders.

### 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, as well as monitoring complaints and Freedom of Information requests received by the Authority. Member Services also provides support to meetings of the New Forest Consultative Panel and has made arrangements for the annual election of the Chairman of the Panel.
- In conjunction with the Authority's Senior Solicitor the Section has undertaken a review of the Authority's Standing Orders which will be brought to the full Authority in due course.

- In accordance with the new training programme for members, Member Services organised a members' briefing session by Natural England on 15 January 2008, a visit to the workshop in Burley where the boundary markers are made and a briefing on the Local Access Forum and transport issues in the New Forest on 19 February 2008. In addition, the section has begun arrangements for the Southern Parks' Conference on 7 and 8 May 2008.
- The section has designed and produced new nameplates and blotter pads (showing the twin purposes) for Authority meetings, issued updates for the Yearbook, and updated its records of members' involvement in working groups, task and finish groups and topic groups.

## **Corporate Services**

### **14 Human Resources**

- As of 31 January 2008 the Authority had 70 permanent members of staff or 65.34 FTE of whom 12 are part time, 12 are on fixed term contracts and 1 post is externally funded.
- To cover sickness absence Richard Nash joined as a temporary Planning Officer in Development Control and in February Lucie Sneddon joined the Authority as a Planning Officer in a new post dealing with compliance.
- Discussions with Unison on draft HR policies continued in January with further meetings scheduled in February. Good progress continues to be made. All staff are being given an opportunity to comment on the policies at this stage.
- Two compulsory stress management training sessions for managers have taken place. All other staff have been offered stress awareness training and twenty two staff have taken up the opportunity to attend one of the two training days planned between February and March.
- Lifestyle medicals have also been offered to all staff, these will take in February and March.

### **15 ICT**

- In house testing of the Authority's time recoding system started on 11 February in the Corporate Services and Conservation Recreation and Sustainable Development directorates. The intention is to launch the system to all staff at the start of the

new financial year. The system will allow improved allocation and tracking of the use of staff time.

- Small scale trials have begun exploring alternative approaches to electronic records and data management within the Authority. Implementing electronic document and record management will complete the Authority's suite of core business systems.
- Two members have been trained and enabled to use the Authority's remote access system to access email, intranet and GIS facilities. The training was well received and it is hoped that more members will receive training in the future.

## **16 Finance and performance**

- Budget preparation is underway. The Resources and Performance Committee on 31 January discussed the Authority's draft financial strategy for 2008/09 – 2010/11 and approved it for recommendation to the Authority. The strategy should allow modest growth on programmes supporting the twin purposes and planning, while maintaining healthy but diminishing reserves over the next three years. The long term position remains unsustainable on current predictions.
- Work on drafting the Authority's third Corporate Plan is underway.

## **Recommendation**

**To note the report.**