

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 18 JANUARY 2007

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

Summary

Encouraging progress on all fronts as new specialist staff start to make an impact and the new Director of Corporate Services re-activates work on completing the Authority's development and on strategic financial and corporate planning. The Development Control Team met, for the first time, its planning targets for processing household and minor applications – marking steady improvement in performance over 9 months.

Recommendation

To note the report.

Resources

Routine

Paper

NFNPA 147/07: Cover paper

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1. This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 16 November for all work except planning development control and enforcement – which covers activity in November and December. Encouraging progress on all fronts as new specialist staff start to make an impact and the new Director of Corporate Services re-activates work on completing the Authority's development and on strategic financial and corporate planning. The Development Control Team met, for the first time, its planning targets for processing household and minor applications – marking steady improvement in performance over 9 months.

MEMBERS

2. Some members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events:
 - Workshop on Pony Paddocks, 30 November
 - Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 14 December
 - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 19 December
 - Workshop on performance indicators and risk log, 4 January
 - New Forest Consultative Panel meeting, 4 January
 - Workshop on Recreation Management Strategy, 11 January
 - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 16 January
 - Briefing sessions on PPS3 and the Joint Core Strategy with NFDC, 17 January
3. Forthcoming activities include:
 - Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 18 January
 - Core Strategy Member Group meeting, 22 January
 - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 20 February
 - Training for Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen, 21 February
 - Standards Committee meeting, 26 February
 - Training on equality and diversity, 28 February
 - Corporate Plan Task and Finish Groups – dates yet to be confirmed.

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

First Purpose

Conservation and Enhancement

4. Corporate Plan

- **All conservation and enhancement objectives and most understanding and enjoyment objectives (C1-8/U3-8)**
Kathryn Boler (External Funding Officer) has begun meeting with staff and partners to discuss future projects which may require external funding, whilst also compiling a database of potential funding sources. These will feed into the Authority's future funding strategy which will be developed during the next few months.
- **Commoning and farming; Nature conservation (C1/C3)**
The Authority has been successful in securing a Heritage Lottery Fund Project Planning Grant of £44,000 in partnership with Natural England, the Forestry Commission, the New Forest Commoners Defence Association and the New Forest Trust. The grant will provide the partnership with additional resources in order to build up a Stage 1 Landscape Partnership application to the Fund for three initiatives: the restoration of forest habitats, supporting and sustaining communing and deepening and broadening the interest and involvement of people in the heritage of the New Forest.
- **Landscape conservation (C2)**
Sarah Kelly (Landscape Officer) has been involved in the Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group, which is closely linked to the Decluttering Project (removal of signs that are unnecessary or duplicated). Both these projects have an ongoing involvement. There is a partnership project getting underway to discuss the way forward in the Tranquil Areas Study, between CPRE, New Forest National Park Authority, North Wessex Downs AONB and Hampshire County Council.
- **Sustainable development (SE1)**
Most of December has been spent putting in place the agreements and monitoring requirements of the six projects approved by the Sustainable Development Fund Panel at the start of the month: New Forest Electric Vehicle Hire Scheme (supporting the purchase of ten electric cars to be available for hire from Burley, Lyndhurst and Brockenhurst);
 - BioMap New Forest (a project to develop both demand and supply within the local wood fuel market);
 - The Mill at Gordleton - Waterwheel Renewal Project (reinstating a waterwheel in an old flour mill to provide at least 25% of the hotel's electricity);

- Aren't Birds Brilliant! In the New Forest (establishing a viewing station for people to view live nest cam images of raptors and delivering key messages about ground nesting birds);
 - Ipley Manor District Heating System (a scheme to provide space and water heating to five dwellings from a wood fuel boiler using woodchip obtained from the sustainable management of the estate woodlands);
 - Friends of Lepe Country Park (to establish a Friends of Lepe Country Park group to carry out practical conservation work and contribute to the future management of the site).
- Time has also been spent processing the latest round of grant claims from existing projects and Claire also gave a presentation on 'green buildings' to the Voluntary Sector Forum, organised by Community First.
- **Commoning and farming; sustainable development (C1 and SE1)**
 Attended New Forest LEADER+ Local Action Group and presented a proposal for a delegated grant scheme which will allow LEADER+ funds to be spent within the New Forest until September 2008. The Authority will take on the management of the scheme which can be used to fund projects which deliver LEADER+ objectives. The funding pot amounts to just under £100,000 and is awaiting approval from Government Office for the South East.

5. **Other Activities**

The Commoning Review Group had their second meeting and members are planning open meetings with commoners to be held in January.

Second Purpose

Understanding and Enjoyment

6. **Partnership working:**

- Staff assisted with the organisation of, and made a presentation to, the National Association of Field Studies Officers Conference, held this year in Winchester.
- An introductory meeting was held with Forest Arts Centre on education and interpretation issues, and another with Brockenhurst College specifically relating to adult and continuing education provision.
- A joint meeting with Forestry Commission's PROGRESS team discussed a range of proposed access management, community involvement and education initiatives.
- Officers attended meetings with tourism stakeholders under the Market Town Health Check initiatives (for Ringwood, and for Hythe

and Dibden). Staff also attended a Seminar providing feedback from UK protected landscapes who have experience of seeking and operating the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, as a basis for considering its appropriateness for the New Forest.

- Progression of implementation of the National Cycle Network (Route 2) through the National Park was discussed and agreed at one of several meetings with transport policy officers.
- Staff attended an All Parks Visitor Centre meeting with counterparts from other National Park Authorities.

7. Corporate Plan

- **Recreation and Visitor Management (U1):** Prepared Expression of Interest for consultants to tender to facilitate the development of the Recreation Management Strategy. Planned a member workshop event on the Strategy for January 2007, undertook informal consultation with recreation providers and interest groups, through direct meetings and by post.
- **Understanding and awareness (U3):** Finalised initial list of Authority run events for 2007. Progressed work of the Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group and the development of an interpretation strategy. Worked with, and subsequently received the report, of Consultants advising on a possible association with the New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust at the New Forest Museum complex in Lyndhurst. (See separate Authority paper).
- **Education programme (U4):** Manifesto pledge on Learning Outside the Classroom submitted. Organised and delivered a local school visit.
- **Recreation and Visitor Management (U6):** Agreed parameters for ensuring that access and rights of way issues are fully considered in relation to planning applications.
- **Countryside Access (U7):** Organised and facilitated third meeting of the New Forest Access Forum. Presentation made to Consultative Panel to promote the Small Grant Scheme for access improvements.

8. Other activities

- Website content development.
- Response to Hampshire County Council's initial consultation on claimed byways.

Planning Policy

9. Corporate Plan

Partnership working (A3):

- Cross organisational meetings to link the review of the National Park Management Plan, the New Forest District Community Strategy and the Local Development Framework Core Strategy.
- The joint New Forest National Park Authority and New Forest District Issues and Options paper was published for public consultation in November 2006. It is the first stage in the development of the joint Core Strategy, and the consultation will run until the end of January 2007. This involves close integration with the review of the National Park Management Plan being led by Nick Evans and the NFDC Community Strategy.

Spatial planning policies (A4):

- The public examination into the South East Plan started in late November, and the National Park Authority submitted its evidence on 4 December 2006. The Authority has been invited to appear at five sessions between 17 and 26 January 2007, including the coast and countryside (including the New Forest National Park policy); the South Hampshire proposals for growth; housing and the countryside; and infrastructure; and the proposals for the Rest of Hampshire sub-regional area.
- Consultation on the extension of the submitted Hampshire Minerals and Waste Core Strategy into the Wiltshire part of the National Park (thus providing a consistent policy framework across the whole Park) closed on 6 December. A total of 52 responses were received from 15 respondents, the majority of which consider the Core Strategy to be 'sound'. However, a number of respondents considered the Strategy to be 'unsound'. A meeting will be held with these respondents in early January 2007 to discuss their concerns. The public examination into the draft Core Strategy starts on 23 January 2007, and is expected to last approximately three weeks.

Development Control

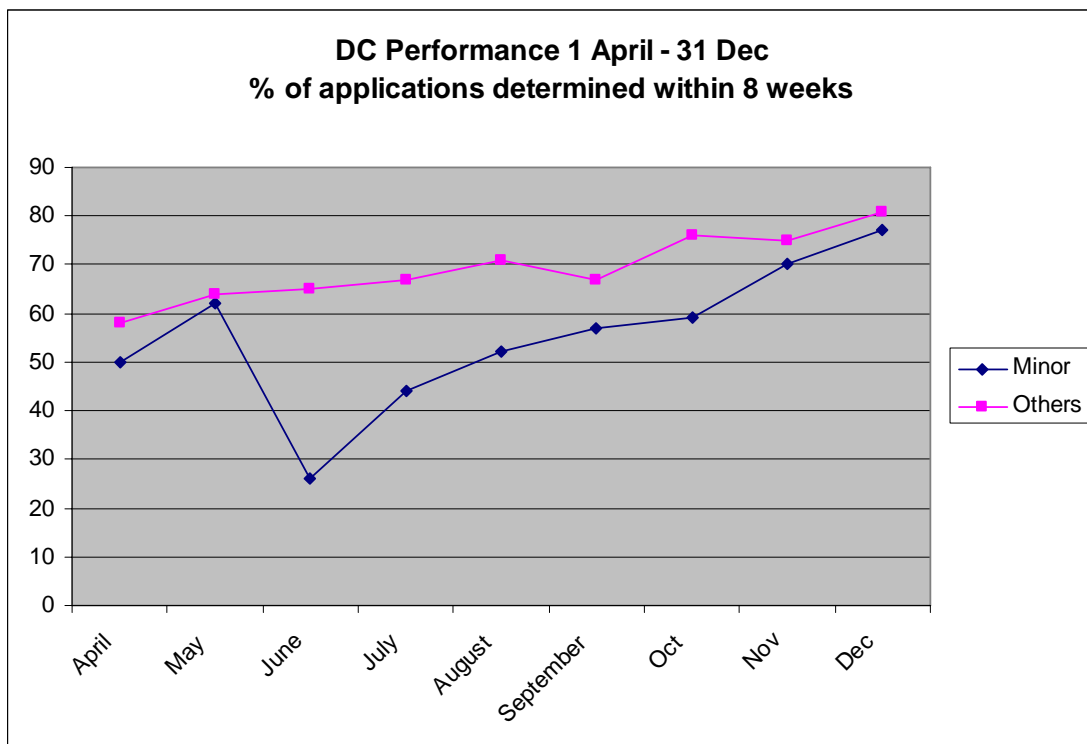
10. During November and December the Development Control unit carried out the following work:

Planning applications: received 179. Applications continue to be registered within two to three working days following receipt. The

Authority remains on course to receive the projected 1,400 planning applications per year.

Planning decisions: 189 issued, of which 122 were approved (65%) and 64 were refused (34%). Seven applications were withdrawn. 21 (11%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meetings held on 21 November and 19 December.

The Development Control unit continues to make steady progress in meeting the application targets, as noted in the chart below. In December, the targets for both householder and minor applications were met, with 81% of householder applications being determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 77% of minor applications being determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).



Live planning applications: 267 at 31 December, compared with 275 at 31 October.

Appeals: 18 new appeals. Of the 19 appeal decisions in November and December, 12 were dismissed and seven were allowed. Four appeals were withdrawn. The chart below sets out the number of appeals received and determined since 1 April 2006.

	Against decisions taken by predecessor LPAs	Against decisions taken by NFNPA	Total
Appeals Received	9	56	65
Appeals Determined	67	7	74
Appeals Allowed	24	2	26
Appeals Dismissed	43	5	48
% of appeals allowed	36%	29%	35%
Number of outstanding appeals	8	48	56

Enforcement: 100 new enforcement cases were registered in November and December and 125 cases were closed. There are currently some 250 outstanding enforcement cases. The Authority issued its first Temporary Stop Notice in November in response to an unauthorised waste tipping operation on a site in Copythorne Parish. This action was followed up in December with the issue of an Enforcement Notice and Stop Notice on the expiry of the Temporary Stop Notice.

Other: Together with Bob Morris, Steve Avery attended a meeting of Copythorne Parish Council in December to talk about development control in the National Park. The meeting was positive and informative and covered a number of issues including publicity on planning applications, parish briefing notes and outstanding enforcement cases.

11. **Environmental Design Update - December 2006**

- Work has continued on the Acolaid planning system in respect of tree preservation orders and managing tree work applications. Quotes have been requested for the Listed Building web module. **(Corporate Plan Objective A1).**
- 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.
- 12 tree work applications were received during December and 16 determined, all within 8 weeks of registration.

- 3 new Tree Preservation Orders were made in December. There is no set target for making new Tree Preservation Orders. They are made in the interests of amenity and expediency as required.
- A tree Pruning Advice notice is in preparation and work is continuing to improve the Tree Works Application form and associated information, for both paper and web based use.
- Work is continuing on design guidance for new agricultural buildings. **(Corporate Plan Objective C7)**
- We are continuing to put together a framework for a Conservation Area Management Plan which will cover all conservation areas in the Park and at the same time are looking at the extent of existing conservation areas. We will be carrying out further internal consultation during January. **(Corporate Plan Objective C7)**
- Work is continuing on text and illustrative material for the Park's website. **(Corporate Plan Objective A1)**
- Enforcement action in respect of Eastclose Hotel, Bransgore, which received press coverage earlier in the year, was concluded with the owner replacing all 15 unauthorised double glazed replacement windows with sash windows matching the originals. **(Corporate Plan Objective A5)**
- After a slow start and following extensive promotion of the scheme we have now started to receive applications for historic building grant assistance. The applications received are for repairs to the timber frame at Chase End, Hyde, a 19th century listed cottage, repairs to a substantial and significantly leaning chimney at Stydd House Lyndhurst, a listed building built in 1871 and repairs to brickwork and chimneys at The Gate Lodge Hinchleslea, an attractive 19th century listed lodge building. **(Corporate Plan Objective C7)**

CORPORATE FUNCTIONS

Communications

12. Corporate Plan

- The website was improved with significant amounts of new material being added in areas such as consultations, disability equality and 'sounds of the Forest'. **(A1, U3, U4)**
- An on-line photographic library was established and guidance was published for staff on how to use it. **(A1)**
- 'People' photography was commissioned for wide use in publicity material. **(A1)**

- The Head of Communications attended and contributed to joint meetings with the Forestry Commission and the Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group. **(U3)**
- A brief was issued for making a short introductory film about the National Park for use in presentations, talks and on the website. **(U3, U4)**
- A brief was written for a consultant to advise on the feasibility of producing National Park merchandise as a way of generating income. This work will be subsumed into the Future Funding study. **(A1, C4, U3)**
- Further work was carried out on the next stage of developing the National Park's corporate identity for publication in 2007. **(A1, U3)**
- The Communications Strategy was drafted with input from the Communications Working Group. **(A1)**. (See separate Authority paper).
- With the Chairman, press visits were hosted to the National Park by *Country Walking* magazine and local publications. **(A1, U3)**A 'wash-up' meeting was organised to learn from this year's New Forest Show stand and to start planning for next year's. **(U3)**

13. **Partnership working**

- The joint litter awareness initiative with the Forestry Commission and New Forest District Council for spring 2007 was developed. **(C2)**
- Working with the Understanding and Enjoyment Directorate, content was finalised for the 2007 *Forest Focus* visitor newspaper in conjunction with the Forestry Commission. **(U3)**

14. **Other activities**

- The National Park Authority Christmas card was produced and issued.
- 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.

Member Services

15. Member Services have been involved in facilitating preparations for Authority and committee meetings, providing committee and member support and following up on actions arising from the meetings.
16. Other work undertaken by the Section included providing support to the Independent Remuneration Panel reviewing members' allowances and drafting a report to the Standards Committee and then the Authority on the recommendations of the Panel. The Section also assisted in arranging for a number of training and workshop sessions for

members. Work on the 2007 Authority yearbook is being finalised – this publication contains a diary of Authority meeting dates and other information useful to members and officers. Member Services also distributed members' manuals received from ANPA and updated the members' photoboard and Authority document folders.

Corporate Services

17. Business support

- Work on identifying a permanent site for the Park headquarters intensified over the last two months. Natural England and Authority officers jointly have been working to develop co - location solutions as a potential model for the permanent accommodation of both organisations.
- The Authority is working in partnership with New Forest District Council to deliver a full range of health and safety training for staff. This will include the establishment of a Health and Safety Forum.
- The number of visitors to South Efford House headquarters has remained at an average of just over 500 a month since May 2006.

18. Human Resources

- HR Policy work is now entering phase 4 of the initial drafting process which will complete the core suite of policies leading to the preparation of a Staff Handbook in the Spring, following full staff consultation.
- The Authority is consulting stakeholder groups on our Disability and Equality scheme. The intention is to establish a network of interested parties that will support us in continuing to develop both internal and public facing policies and practices.
- In December the following staff were recruited:
Administration Officer: Naomi Stone, joined 2 January 2007
P/A to Chief Executive and Chairman: Susan Barnes, joined on 2 January 2007.
- Following on from the review of planning workloads and staffing, Management Board agreed to commission a full workflow analysis. Consultants Naked Eye have been engaged to complete this analysis and prepare recommendations for improvements in the planning processes.

19. ICT

- IDOX, the Authority's Electronic Document and Records Management System (ERDMS) has been demonstrated to key staff

including enhanced functions such as complaints logging. An administration working group led by the head of ICT is preparing file structures for full roll out of the system before April.

- A full set of aerial photographs covering the National Park for the years 2000 and 2005, is being acquired.
- Park Map, the Authority's intranet based Geographical Information System (GIS), has been upgraded.
- Additional modules to hold data on trees and tree work applications have been purchased from Plantech.

20. Finance and performance

- Smith and Williamson have been appointed as Consultants for the joint Defra / Authority Future Funding Study, which will look at :
 - the Authority's funding needs for the next year and future years
 - the prospects for raising additional income; and
 - the Authority's strategy relating to operating costs.
- A Joint member workshop to develop key local performance indicators was facilitated on 4 January. The outcomes from this workshop will be integrated into the revision of the Corporate Plan for 2007/08.

Recommendation

To note the report.