

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 26 MARCH 2009

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY APPOINTMENT TO THE NEW FOREST COURT OF VERDERERS

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

Summary:

1. The Authority's appointment to the New Forest Court of Verderers has been vacant since the untimely death of Diana Halford in September 2008. This report suggests that the appointment of her replacement take place at the next Annual Authority meeting on 25 June.

Recommendation

That the National Park Authority's appointment to the New Forest Court of Verderers, to fill the current vacancy, be made at the June Annual Authority meeting with Peter Frost being asked to represent the Authority's interests informally during the intervening period.

Paper:

NFNPA 288/09:	Cover paper
NFNPA 288/09 Annex 1:	New Forest Court of Verderers
NFNPA 185/07:	Appointment of Authority Representatives on External Organisations
NFNPA 158/07:	New Forest Court of Verderers – National Park Authority Appointment

Contact:

Lindsay Cornish
Tel: 01590 646633
Email: Lindsay.cornish@newforestnpa.gov.uk

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 26 MARCH 2009

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY APPOINTMENT TO THE NEW FOREST COURT OF VERDERERS

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

1 Background

- 1.1 Under the New Forest Act 1949, as the planning authority for the area, the Authority is responsible for making one appointment to the New Forest Court of Verderers. Full background on the appointment is set out in Authority report NFNPA 158/07 (22 February 2007) and a summary of the role is provided at **Annex 1**. Although not specifically set out in the Act, the working objective for the post used for the appointment process and taking account of the role of the Verderers set out in the New Forest Acts, is :
- to provide information and advice on the purposes, objectives and policies of the National Park, and in particular its planning policies and procedures, to assist the Verderers in carrying out their duties.
- 1.2 The Authority's representative sits as a Verderer in a decision-making capacity, taking into account the representations made, and any national park considerations.
- 1.3 The duration of the post has followed the member's term of appointment with the Authority. Thus for Secretary of State appointees, the term is usually three years, and for local authority appointees and Secretary of State Parish Council appointees it is up to four. Reappointment is not automatic and would be dependent on a decision of the Authority taking into account relevant factors at the end of the appointment term and an assessment of the appointee's performance in that role. The maximum term for the appointment is not set down in legislation but in principle would be expected to be nine years for Secretary of State appointees (i.e. three terms) and eight years for local authority and Parish Council appointees (i.e. two terms). Any member who has previously served as an appointed Verderer for the maximum period proposed for Authority members would not in principle be entitled to put themselves forward for appointment.

1.4 Diana Halford was appointed as the Authority's representative on the New Forest Court of Verderers at the Authority's Annual Meeting on 28 June 2007 for four years (to coincide with the term of her appointment to the Authority). The appointment has remained vacant since Diana's death in September 2008.

2 Options for appointment

2.1 The options are:

- i) fill the vacancy now, either for a full term, or on a temporary basis until the next Annual Meeting of the Authority on 26 June
- ii) leave the vacancy open until the Authority's Annual Meeting in June when all other appointments will be made.

2.2. Issues which need to be considered include: further changes in the membership of the Authority by the June meeting and the overall balance of the representative role that members are asked to carry out; and the extent to which the Court's business would require member input over the intervening months.

2.3 As of 1 April 2009, the Authority will have two new members: Jeremy Heron (a Secretary of State Parish Council appointee replacing Diana Halford) and John Pemberton (a Secretary of State appointee replacing Susan Achmatowicz). In June there are elections to Hampshire County Council and the new unitary Wiltshire Council. (We understand neither Kathy Heron nor Lee Dunsdon is intending to stand for re-election to Hampshire County Council.) Thus the make up of the Authority and the related experience and knowledge of members will change to some extent by the Annual meeting. Existing members whose appointments do not require renewal may also have a view on which of their current roles they would wish to continue or relinquish, or whether there are any other roles for which they would wish to put themselves forward.

2.4 Against this background the Chief Executive sought the views of the Official Verderer on the urgency with which he felt the appointment should be filled. His principal concern was that there should be continuity with any new appointment, enabling the appointee to serve a 'full' term. He also recognised that there would be a number of changes in the Authority's make up by the end of June which might affect the outcome of the appointment process. Looking ahead over the next few months at both the Verderers' and the Authority's business priorities, he felt there were no issues which would require an urgent appointment, noting in particular that the Verderers were well engaged in the fora dealing with the revision of the draft National park Plan.

3 Discussion

- 3.1 Appointments to all external organisations are normally made annually, or for a pre-determined longer period, at the Authority's Annual meeting in June. This enables members to take a holistic view of the balance of representation and to review their own priorities for engagement in the Authority's work.
- 3.2 Unusually, in the short history of the Authority, there will be a number of changes in membership by the end of June which will affect the overall balance of knowledge and experience members bring to its work.
- 3.3 For these reasons, and taking account of the Official Verderer's views on the timing of the appointment, on balance deferring the appointment to the Court of Verderers until the Annual Authority meeting in June would be the best solution. An interim appointment for three months seems the least satisfactory solution given the potential loss of continuity. Not making an immediate or interim appointment has the added benefit that members who might be interested in offering themselves for appointment would have the opportunity to see the Court's work in practice and to discuss the role with the Official Verderer, or Peter Frost - who is a Natural England appointed Verderer. The Official Verderer has indicated his willingness to talk to prospective candidates, and if appropriate, arrange for them to attend part of the Verderers' Committee meetings.
- 3.4 Not making the appointment until June would, however, mean that the Authority would not be represented at the Court for a further three meetings. During this period, Peter Frost could be asked informally to represent the Authority's position at the Court, should the need arise, although he would not be able to vote as the Authority's representative. His position would supplement the officer level contact that already occurs on routine and partnership matters such as work on animal accidents and ICT projects.

4 Recommendation

That the National Park Authority's appointment to the New Forest Court of Verderers, to fill the current vacancy, be made at the June Annual Authority meeting with Peter Frost being asked to represent the Authority's interests informally during the intervening period.

New Forest Court of Verderers

Frequency of meetings

Monthly

Terms of reference/ brief description of aims and objective

- Protect and administer the New Forest's unique agricultural commoning practices;
- Conserve its traditional landscape, wildlife and aesthetic character, including its flora and fauna, peacefulness, natural beauty and cultural heritage;
- Safeguard a viable future for commoning upon which the foregoing depends.

Status of Authority – involvement and any specific requirements for member involvement

Decision making – full participation in decisions of the Court of Verderers. Member represents the Authority and advises on all aspects of the Authority's policies and objectives and their implementation. The appointee to the Court of Verderers should have a good knowledge of the Forest and Forest farming and ideally be a member of the Planning Development Control Committee.

Lead National Park Authority officer contact details

Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive
lindsay.cornish@newforesnpa.gov.uk
01590 646633

Contact details for outside body

The Queen's House
High Street
Lyndhurst
Hampshire
SO43 7NH