

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 22 May 2008

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 26 March 2008 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in March and April.

Recommendation:

To note the report

Paper:

NFNPA 248/08: Cover paper

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AUTHORITY MEETING – 26 MARCH 2008

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Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

- 1 This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 26 March 2008 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in March and April.

Members

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

- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 14 April
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting followed by Members' Training Session on Design in the National Park, 15 April
- ANPA Workshop, 23 to 25 April
- Tour for members of the Planning Development Control Committee, 28 April
- Briefing on Pony Paddocks and Recreational Horse Keeping, 30 April
- New Forest Consultative Panel Meeting, 1 May
- Recreation Management Strategy member advisory group meeting, 6 May
- Standards Committee meeting, 6 May
- Southern National Parks Conference, 7 and 8 May
- New Forest National Park Plan workshop, 16 May
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting followed by all member workshop on development control policies, 20 May

- 3 Forthcoming activities include:

- Members' briefing and discussion on Recreation Management Strategy, following the Authority meeting on 22 May
- Chairman's Informal Briefing Session, 30 May
- New Forest Access Forum, 2 June
- Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 10 June
- Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 17 June.

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

Conservation, Recreation and Sustainable Development

4 Partnership working

Funding

- Officers have collated a master list of Authority and key partner projects requiring external funding. The projects are being prioritised and will form the basis of our work to secure external funding over the next three years.
- Officers have prepared a proposal outlining the plans for landscape restoration in the New Forest to present to the Tubney Charitable Trust. Although the Trust is not looking for applications at this time, it is changing its focus to support the enhancement of UK biodiversity through work with landowners on a landscape scale and it was felt that we should take the opportunity to make them aware of the work in the New Forest, in the hope that they would consider being a partner in this project.
- Officers met representatives of the New Forest Livestock Society to discuss progress on the planning for phase 2 improvements to the Beaulieu Road Sales Yard and the work still required before a full application can be submitted for funding from the Rural Development Programme England which is distributed via SEEDA.

5 Corporate Plan

Landscape (C2)

- Discussions about pony paddocks and their impact on the landscape have taken place with the New Forest Equestrian Association. Further initiatives and a wider project are planned.
- The Authority was represented at the Annual General Meeting of the Hampshire Gardens Trust and at a 'Quiet Conference' organised by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England at which issues of noise pollution and tranquillity were discussed.

Conservation of cultural heritage (C6)

- Work has started on updating the archaeological historic landscape document produced for the New Forest Committee in 1997 which was never published. The aim is to correct and edit the document and provide suitable illustrations so that it can be placed on the Authority's web site.

- As part of the Higher Level Stewardship scheme applications process, work on plotting all the Farm Environment Plans boundaries within the Park onto the GIS as a single layer has now started. This will allow the data received to be checked and errors corrected. The Historic Environment information request for the Minstead Manorial Waste Farm Environment Plan is being processed.
- The Authority archaeologist took part in the New Forest section of the Hampshire Field Club's excavation of a small mound near Fritham. The site has been known about since the 1860s when J Wise excavated five of the small mounds. A number of these mounds have recently been accurately plotted and further archaeological work to excavate at least one additional mound is anticipated in an attempt to explain their function and significance.
- Archaeological and historical research has been undertaken to acquire information on the Roman Roads of the New Forest.
- Two highly successful 'Saltpans and Shipwreck' tours of the Lymington nature reserve took place on Saturday April 26 as part of the New Forest Centre's 'Walk and Talk' programme.
- Officers met Professor Tony Brown from Southampton University to discuss potential Geoarchaeology research within the New Forest National Park and the potential for designating regionally important geological sites. The possibility of future collaborative pollen analytical (palynological) projects was explored along with bringing to publication past research.

Recreation (U1)

- Work on developing the Recreation Management Strategy continues with Land Use Consultants with the aim of presenting a consultation draft to the Authority in June.

Traffic, transport and Tourism (U2)

- Officers followed up on an invitation to visit Fordingbridge Visitor Information Centre and Museum – meeting representatives from each. The Authority offered to provide a National Park map and awareness panel for display in the Visitor Information Centre; this is similar to existing arrangements with Lyndhurst Visitor Information Centre. The provision of this information will help to convey National Park messages to local people and visitors.
- Officers continue to prepare for the launch of the New Forest Tour, by chairing and coordinating a Steering Group. During summer 2008, the New Forest Tour will run between 24 May and 31 August 2008. This represents the final year of the three-year funding arrangement that includes a funding

contribution from the Authority. The success of the New Forest Tour this summer will influence business models for onward investment in future years. It was confirmed that the 2008 marketing campaign will include a New Forest Tour bus being present as a static display for the three days of the New Forest Show.

- Officers attended the quarterly joint tourism meeting between New Forest District Council Tourism Service and the Authority. The meeting included discussions on visitor numbers and economic spend, Sustainable Tourism Strategy development for the New Forest destination, and how key National Park messages can be promoted to visitors through Visitor Information Centres.

Access (U6)

- Officers attended an Access Seminar organised by the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB team. The seminar included presentations from a blind walker, the chair of the Dorset Local Access Forum, several Rights of Way officers and managers, and the regional advisor from Natural England on Open Access. The seminar was well attended, and provided many opportunities to meet new contacts and network with colleagues from other organisations.
- Officers attended a full meeting of the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum in Winchester. Presentations included updates on national and local projects and initiatives, a brief report on the coastal access aspects of the Marine Bill, and an informative discussion on the Pathwatch scheme that operates in Sussex to combat anti-social and illegal vehicular use in the countryside. Hampshire County Council has recently commissioned some research into dog walking in the countryside, and the consultant presented his findings to the Forum which was then asked for its recommendations on how the findings should be taken forward by the County Council.
- Officers helped to staff the Authority's marquee at "Doggie Fun Day", organised by the Forestry Commission at Wilverley Car Park. The day was well attended by local dog walkers.

Sustainable Development (SE 1)

- Preliminary meetings and site visits with two new commoners wishing to apply to build dwellings under the Commoners Dwelling Scheme took place.
- Officers attended a meeting arranged by the National Farmers Union on Bluetongue. We discussed the need to encourage all farmers and commoners to vaccinate their stock as soon as

vaccines become available in early May and the Authority has written to all commoners with additional information.

- Members are currently being recruited to the Sustainable Development Fund Panel.
- Officers attended a meeting of Lyndhurst Chamber of Trade to highlight potential ways to improve the environmental sustainability of the businesses and discuss potential projects. Future green business events – particularly a 'sustainability trade fair' are in preparation.
- A woodfuel seminar is being planned at Ipley Manor based around the Sustainable Development Fund supported district heating system.

Information and Visitor Services

6 Corporate Plan

- Animal accident hotline cards continue to be welcomed at a wide range of outlets in and around the National Park. **(A1, U3)**
- The next ten education factsheets have been printed and are available on the Authority's website (in the student area), bringing the total to fourteen; a very significant resource for schools and colleges, but also useful in a wide range of other situations. Folders to house the completed collection have been printed and will be sent to local schools and partner organisations as a reference resource. **(U4)**
- An abridged version of the National Park *Pocket Guide* was prepared for inclusion in hotel room folders. **(A1, U3)**
- Only three of the planned 46 timber boundary markers remain to be installed. Zinc way-marker discs (for some 50 minor footpath locations) have been given to County Council footpath officers for fixing to existing sign-posts. 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 Authority's website in the 'What's On' pages. The first events have been popular and successful. **(U3)**
- Options for the proposed mobile information and interpretation unit will be presented to the Authority, a separate paper refers.
- A good selection of applications for pilot 'Local Information Points' have been received from Burley, Brockenhurst and Beaulieu. We hope these initiatives will be operational this summer. **(U3)**
- The 'Your Shout' project - engaging with young people for input into the Management Plan resulted in a dramatic and thought-provoking theatre piece at the Management Plan concluding event in March. A short film is also being made of the project. **(U4)**

- A leaflet, poster and postcard were published specifically to promote the Park's special qualities. **(A1, U3)**
- An additional set of four postcards were published which highlight interesting facts about the National Park, and raises awareness of litter, wildfires, animal accidents and disturbance to ground-nesting birds. **(U3)**
- *Park Life No.5* was published and distributed in April. **(A1, U3)**
- The appearance and legibility of the National Park website has been updated and improved. Work is under way to test the usability of the site two years on and to inform future developments. **(A1)**
- Planning is under way for the National Park stand at the New Forest Show in July. **(A1, U3)**

7 Partnership working

- The final design for the new animal accident warning sign to replace the very large shield-shaped signs located at the start of high-risk routes is being drawn up by County and District highways officers. We hope the new sign will be trialled on the B3054 Lymington to Dibden Purlieu pilot route, as part of the wider programme of sign rationalization. **(U3)**
- As part of the partnership arrangements between the Ninth Centenary Trust and the National Park Authority, work continued on the detailed design and planning scheme for the re-branding of the exterior and updating displays inside the New Forest Centre. A new screen showing highlights from the webcam at the Reptile Centre has been installed. **(U3)**
- The joint RSPB, Forestry Commission, Carnx Films and National Park '*Aren't Birds Brilliant! in the New Forest*' project has been launched. The start to the season has gone well; nesting goshawks are on view and feedback from visitors is excellent. **(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)**
- A taster training day on Forest Schools was organised for members of the Educators' Forum. **(U4)**
- The spring 2008 Forest Force litter pick included public events, local community volunteer effort and a joint staff litter pick with New Forest District Council and the Forestry Commission. **(U3)**

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.

There were more than 50 media enquiries in April, with particular interest being shown in proposals for the location of the Authority's permanent headquarters and the refusal of permission to apply for a judicial review of the decision to allow expansion of Bournemouth Airport. **(A1, U3)**

- Members Bob Morris and Tony Gentle, Martin O'Neill (Director of Information and Visitor Services) and Nigel Matthews (Head of Visitor Services) attended a three-day workshop in Tewkesbury organised by the Association of National Park Authorities on the subjects of education and interpretation. Work from around the National Parks was showcased including examples from the New Forest. The New Forest team felt they learned a great deal that could be applied here in the coming months. **(A1)**

Planning Policy

9 Corporate Plan

Corporate Plan Objective A3: Management Plan

- The concluding workshop for the National Park Management Plan / Core Strategy was held at the Beaulieu Road Hotel on 17 March. The workshop included a performance by the Forest Forge theatre group and discussion of potential targets and indicators for the emerging objectives. The event was attended by over 70 individuals. Officers are now drafting the Management Plan / Core Strategy - now known as the New Forest National Park Plan, for internal consultation in May, and consideration by members in June.
- An internal meeting was held to discuss the State of the Park Report and monitoring arrangements for the New Forest National Park Plan.
- Work has continued throughout April in developing the National Park Plan in preparation for publication of a draft document for consultation in the summer. This has included refining the outline policies discussed at the workshops held over the winter, developing the National Park Vision and the spatial strategy, and detailed work on the objectives linked to the two statutory National Park purposes and National Park duty. The Plan identifies three priority themes facing the National Park – climate change, tranquillity and the incremental erosion of character – and these themes have been worked up into headline actions. Members have been invited to an all day workshop on 16 May to discuss the draft National Park Plan before it is formally considered in June.
- The National Park Plan will also include an annex of development control policies. These are being developed by the Strategy and

Planning Directorate and members have an opportunity to input into this important process on 20 May after the Planning Development Control Committee.

Corporate Plan Objective A4: Spatial Planning Policies

- Members of the Policy and Plans team attended a training event in Dartmoor National Park. This included discussion with staff at the Dartmoor National Park Authority of their experiences of getting their Core Strategy through independent examination with a 'sound' Inspector's Report.
- Linked to the work on the National Park Plan, the team has been drafting a series of topic papers setting out the relevant national and regional guidance on topics such as housing, climate change, transport and economy within the National Park context. The topic papers also outline the relevant evidence studies undertaken and will be published alongside the draft National Park Plan in the summer.
- The team has also been working on the Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment of the draft National Park Plan. These assessments involve a group of officers from both the National Park Authority and New Forest District Council and the final Sustainability Appraisal Report and Habitats Regulations Assessment will be available for consideration alongside the draft National Park Plan in June.

Corporate Plan Objective A6: 'Section 62' Responsibilities

- Policy and Plans staff gave a presentation to the Sustainable Development Commission on the impacts of aviation from the perspective of a protected landscape. The presentation took place at the National Air Traffic Services (NATS) Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre and referred to the Authority's views on the expansion of Bournemouth Airport and the extension of airspace over the north of the National Park.

10 Other work

- The Authority responded to the draft Green Infrastructure Strategy for Urban South Hampshire. The Authority, and many other consultees, is concerned at the insufficient focus given to the requirements of the Natura 2000 sites within and adjoining the sub-region, and the need for the document to be fully incorporated within the planning system to give it sufficient influence.
- The Authority responded to the Test Valley Borough Council Core Strategy Preferred Development Options consultation. The document is to be generally commended, and includes proposals for a new country park in southern Test Valley which

may support the New Forest through offering recreational opportunities closer to the centres of population in South Hampshire.

- Discussions continued between the National Park Authority, New Forest District Council and Natural England on the appropriate assessment of the emerging planning policies for the National Park area and land within New Forest District.
- The team completed the Authority's response to the Salisbury District Council Core Strategy Preferred Options document. The Authority raised a number of concerns, including; (i) the overlap of policy coverage into the National Park (including the settlements of Landford and Redlynch, where the planning policy framework will be developed by the National Park Authority, not Salisbury District Council); (ii) the scale of development proposed immediately adjacent to the National Park boundary in the Downton – Morgan's Vale area; (iii) the inappropriate way the National Park was seen as a way to attract investment and employment opportunities. Salisbury District Council has agreed to a further period of public consultation on the document before they submit it to the Government Office for the South West for examination.
- On 18 April, the Authority was informed of the High Court's decision to refuse permission for the Authority to apply for a Judicial Review of the decision of Christchurch Borough Council to permit the expansion of Bournemouth Airport. The Judge states that having regard to the Authority's statutory responsibilities, "...*this may have been a proper application to make but it is not arguable.*" There was no order in the decision for the Authority to pay the legal costs of the other parties involved. The decision raises concerns at the statutory protection afforded to National Parks, and highlights the difficulty in assessing tranquillity – one of the New Forest's most valued special qualities.
- The airspace change affecting parts of the north of the National Park came into effect in early April. The change introduces a new air corridor above some of the more tranquil areas of the National Park, as well as affecting two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Authority has written to both the Secretary of State for Transport and the Minister with responsibility for protected landscape, noise and the south east to raise our concerns at the impact of this change on the special qualities of the New Forest. The Authority has received a response from the Civil Aviation Authority refusing our request to be involved in the 12 month operational review of the changes. Officers are considering raising this refusal with the Secretary of State.

11 Development Control

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

Planning applications: received 111. Applications were registered within three working days following receipt.

Planning decisions: 99 issued, of which 71 were approved (72%) and 28 were refused (28%). Four applications were withdrawn. Eleven (11%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 18 March.

Eighty five percent of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 59% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

Live planning applications: 374 at 31 March, compared with 359 at 29 February.

Appeals: Five new appeals received this month. There were no appeal decisions in March.

Enforcement: 41 new enforcement cases were registered in March and 42 cases were closed. There were 290 outstanding enforcement cases at the end of the month and no enforcement notices were served during March.

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

Planning applications: received 116. Applications were registered within three working days following receipt.

Planning decisions: 110 issued, of which 92 were approved (84%) and 18 were refused (16%). Two applications were withdrawn. Seven (6%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 15 April.

Eighty five percent 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: 384 at 30 April, compared with 374 at 31 March.

Appeals: Nine new appeals received this month. There were six appeal decisions in April. Five appeals dismissed, one allowed and two appeals were withdrawn.

Enforcement: 64 new enforcement cases were registered in April and 50 cases were closed. There were 288 outstanding enforcement cases at the end of the month and no enforcement notices were served during April.

12 Environmental Design

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

- The team was consulted by Development Control on 47 applications during March, 20 of which were returned within the 14 day target. 27 are still live (**Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7**)
- Twenty six tree work applications were registered during March and 26 determined, 98% of which within the eight week target date. Three Tree Preservation Orders were made.
- Work is continuing on the preparation of a draft Building Design Guide, for consultation later in the year. (**Corporate Plan Objective A4**)

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

- The team was consulted by Development Control on 76 applications during April, 42 of which were returned within the 14 day target. Twenty three are still live (**Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7**)
- Twenty three tree work applications were registered during April and 34 determined, 100% of which within the eight week target date. Three Tree Preservation Orders were made.
- The review of conservation areas in the National Park as set out in **Corporate Plan Objective C7** is continuing. Following the designation of four new conservation areas the review now moves on to look at the boundaries of the existing conservation areas inherited by the National Park Authority and produce character appraisals for these areas. The first three areas to be reviewed are Lyndhurst, Swan Green and Bank.
- A framework for conservation area management has been developed and preparation of a conservation area management plan for consultation during June is in progress. This is a separate Agenda item.
- The team ran a seminar on building design for members of Planning Development Control Committee, which addressed issues of local distinctiveness and identity and the importance of

scale and composition. Members also saw work which is progressing on the National Park Building Design Guide.

- The team prepared documentation for and attended the annual tour around the Park for Planning Development Control Committee members. A number of design issues were looked at in relation to the appropriateness of new dwellings. Members were shown tree issues in relation to development sites, saw a number of ancient trees and were briefed on progress of the Ancient Tree project. They also saw a number of listed buildings, in particular the cottages which have recently been the subject of a Building Preservation Notice.

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 facilitated a meeting of the Panel on 1 May 2008.
- The section was involved in making arrangements for the Planning Development Control Committee tour on 28 April and the Southern National Parks Conference held at the Forest Lodge Hotel in Lyndhurst on 7-8 May. The section made arrangements for the Standards Committee meeting on 6 May 2008 and presented reports on monitoring members' attendance at meetings and an annual complaints update. Preliminary arrangements are in hand for the next meeting of the Tree Preservation Order Objection Panel.
- A meeting was held with the Authority's Monitoring Officer, Kevin Gardner, on 29 April 2008 to discuss amendments to be made to the Authority's Standing Orders – a report incorporating these changes is being considered at the Authority meeting.
- The team carried out two training sessions for staff in Development Control on recognising and handling complaints received. A meeting was held with Barry Holland to discuss filing and document management.

14 Corporate Services

15 Business Support

- Display screen assessments for all Authority workstations is nearing completion and, where appropriate, corrective measures are being put into place.

- Senior officers of the Authority received a briefing on their revised responsibilities under Health and Safety regulations and a safety plan addressing areas for improvement has been drafted.
- A staff Health and Safety Forum held in April discussed draft policies and operational procedures covering driving at work and lone working.

16 Human Resources

- As of 30 April 2008 we have 69 members of staff or 64.60 full time equivalents, of whom 12 are part-time and 12 are on a fixed term contract.
- In April we said goodbye to Libby Holmes, Project Development Officer, whose one year fixed term contract supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund came to an end. We wish her well in her return to the Ranger Service of the Forestry Commission and are very grateful for the work she undertook for the Authority. In early May Colin Banfield, our Head of ICT, left the Authority to pursue other areas of work. Colin was responsible for setting up an excellent and very robust ICT system for the Authority which in the last two years has had no down time. We wish him well with his future plans and are grateful for his work in providing us with such a strong ICT foundation.
- The post of Director of Strategy and Planning will become vacant this autumn. The post is being advertised in May.
- The Authority has revised the staff appraisal process for 2008/09 following feedback from staff on the pilot scheme run in 2007/08 and the annual appraisal process has started.
- The April meeting with UNISON focused on the Capability Policy, Leave Policy and Sickness Absence Policy.
- Feedback received on the Lifestyle Medicals offered to staff earlier in the year has been positive and the option of running similar sessions in future years is under consideration.

17 ICT

- Following successful trials, the Authority has now introduced a time recording system. The software was developed in-house and will allow managers accurately to report on the time their teams have spent on individual projects or tasks.
- The Authority's computers were also updated with later versions of some core commercial software to keep pace with industry standards.

- A new design for the web page was implemented by the Authority working alongside the National Park web portal team. Work continues with third party suppliers, such as Plantech which supports the Authority's Planning service, to ensure that their web pages are aligned to the new layout.

18 Finance and performance

- The financial market test carried out over the second half of 2007/08 is now complete and, subject to final negotiation on the detail of the service level agreement, the new operating framework will be operational from mid-May. This involves provision of the Chief Finance Officer, strategic financial advice and audit from Hampshire County Council and accountancy systems and services from New Forest District Council. The new arrangements will be piloted for six months before decisions are taken in December on future arrangements.

Recommendation

To note the report.