

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 18 OCTOBER 2007

UPDATE ON FOREST FRIENDLY FARMING AND AN INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE COMMONING REVIEW

Report by: Emma Rigglesworth (Head of Sustainable Development)

Summary:

This paper sets out an initial response to the recommendations of the New Forest Commoning Review, provides an update on Forest Friendly Farming and outlines a framework for developing the future strategic direction of the Authority's work in this area.

Recommendations:

- 1. To welcome and congratulate the hard work of the commoners in producing the New Forest Review and to confirm areas for immediate action.**
- 2. To set up a series of meetings to agree how best to progress the Review recommendations and report back on progress by March 2008.**
- 3. To approve the timetable and process for the submission of an application to the LEADER programme subject to agreeing satisfactory arrangements for managing and administering the programme.**

Resources and Corporate Plan:

Budget for commoning initiatives circa £30,000 for 2007/08.

Corporate Plan Objective 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.

Papers:

- NFNPA 212/07:** Cover paper
NFNPA 212/07: Annex 1 New Forest Commoning Review Recommendations
NFNPA 212/07: Annex 2 Forest Friendly Farming Vision
NFNPA 142/06: Commoning Review

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Land management, primarily farming, commoning, open forest and woodland management are all essential tools in creating and maintaining the special qualities of the New Forest. These are important areas in which the Authority can have a key influence.
- 1.2 Since March 2006, the Authority has taken over the co-ordination of Forest Friendly Farming from the New Forest Committee and has set up a commoner led review to help identify how best to secure the long term future of commoning. The Authority has also progressed a number of related projects which fall within the scope of this area of work.
- 1.3 This paper sets out an initial response to the recommendations of the New Forest Commoning Review, provides an update on Forest Friendly Farming and outlines a framework for developing the future strategic direction of the Authority's work in this area.

2 New Forest Commoning Review

Introduction

- 2.1 Securing the long term future of commoning in the New Forest was given the highest priority at the Authority's stakeholder event run in December 2005 to prioritise the work programme for the National Park Authority. Accordingly a recommendation to set up a commoner led review was included in the Authority's 2006-2007 Corporate Plan. At its meeting held on 16 November 2006, the Authority agreed to make time and resources available to facilitate the process and confirmed its commitment to supporting the outcomes of the review (NFNPA 142/06).

- 2.2 The New Forest Commoning Review group was chaired by the Official Verderer and started work in December 2006. The group, comprising five practising commoners with expertise across a range of issues, was asked to consider all aspects of commoning and to make recommendations to the Authority on how best it can help secure the long term future of commoning. The Review group worked closely with the commoning community to ensure the widest possible involvement of all commoners in the Review. This was achieved through several public events held at the beginning and end of the Review, the setting up of topic groups to explore key issues and through a call for written responses.
- 2.3 The final report makes twenty eight recommendations on how the Authority and appropriate Forest organisations can help secure the long term future of commoning (see **Annex 1**). The recommendations fall into three main areas of work: open forest grazing needs and conservation, financial returns and young people; planning, housing and back up land; education and awareness raising including conflicts between recreation, commoning and conservation.

Commoning Review recommendations and proposed action

- 2.4 While the Authority will need time to digest the report and discuss with other partners how best these recommendations can be taken forward, there are several areas where recent progress has been made or where the Authority is able to make an immediate response. These are set out below.

Support the continuation of locally tailored farm advisory support services to ensure that commoners can utilise agri-environment and farm support schemes (Recommendation 2.2)

Recent progress

- 2.5 Discussions are on-going with key partners i.e. Natural England and Hampshire Wildlife Trust to ensure the continued provision of farm advisory support services which are tailored to New Forest commoners and farmers. These discussions will be concluded by the end of November 2007.

Support the continuation of existing schemes where these can demonstrate added value and business efficiencies to commoning enterprises i.e. New Forest Pony Publicity Group, Forest Friendly Farming Business Grant Scheme, Forest Friendly Farming Training Grant Scheme, New Forest Marque and New Forest Farmers and Producers Markets (Recommendation 2.3)

Recent progress

- 2.6 Authority staff are working with the New Forest LEADER+ Local Action Group and New Forest District Council to secure a successful LEADER application which will include a range of grant schemes which will be available to commoners (see section 3).

Immediate response

- 2.7 In the short term, Authority match funding has been allocated to help support the work of the Pony Publicity Group for 2008. This will allow this active voluntary group to continue their successful work in promoting the New Forest pony to equine buyers across the country.

Explore opportunities to review the Defra Single Payment Scheme (Recommendation 2.4)

Recent progress

- 2.8 Discussions to identify opportunities to increase the Single Payment to New Forest commoners began in May 2005 when the Commoners Defence Association with help from the Forest Friendly Farming Advisor and the Verderers put in an unsuccessful claim for the 'unallocated' grazing area. Whilst initially Defra responded favourably to this claim, it later emerged that the commoners were not eligible as they were not owners of the land referred to in the claim.
- 2.9 In March 2007, following a new initiative led by Authority staff, the Authority, Commoners Defence Association and the Verderers re-opened discussions with Defra to review the initial calculation used to identify the New Forest entitlement. These discussions are nearing a successful conclusion which it is expected will be available at the Authority meeting.

Consult with major landowners to investigate and develop opportunities for the use of land for back-up grazing and affordable homes for commoners (Recommendation 2.5)

Recent progress

- 2.10 In partnership with the Forest Friendly Farming Advisor and NPower/Fawley Power Station, the National Park Authority has secured around 50 hectares of land which will be reinstated to grazing and hopefully serve as additional back-up land.

Provide financial and technical resources to support regular campaigns to reduce the speed of motorists travelling on the Forest (Recommendation 2.6)

Recent progress

- 2.11 Authority staff are providing technical and financial support to the newly formed Animal Accident Reduction Group which has representatives from various stakeholder interests. A long list of current and potential future actions designed to reduce the number of accidents has been compiled and specific organisations have accepted responsibility for taking forward many of these. The Authority is leading on some awareness raising initiatives, including a New Forest Animal Emergency Hotlines card which will be distributed with the next edition of *Park Life*. The Authority is also leading a review of permanent, changing and temporary roadside signs which highlight the dangers of animal accidents.

Reduce collection costs of fallen stock on Forest roads LEADER+ funding secured for New Forest Hunt incinerator (Recommendation 2.7)

Recent progress

- 2.12 The long term future of collection of fallen stock within the New Forest will need careful consideration, but in the short-term the Authority has been able to provide match funding for the purchase of a new incinerator for the hunt using the LEADER+ Small Grant Scheme. The new incinerator was purchased in August 2007.

Support the continuation of the Stallion Scheme including raising awareness of the scheme with the general public (Recommendation 2.9)

Recent progress

- 2.13 The Authority has provided match-funding for this scheme to meet a shortfall in funding for 2007. In the longer term it is hoped that finance for this scheme will be provided through the Verderers' Countryside Stewardship Scheme. This will ensure a more stable medium term solution to financing the scheme until 2013.

Work with the Forestry Commission to implement a programme for the re-instatement of lost forest lawns (Recommendation 2.13)

Immediate response

- 2.14 Funding has been allocated for survey work to support the identification of lawns to be included in the restoration programme which will be carried out in partnership with the commoners and the Forestry Commission. It is hoped that the implementation of the programme could be financed through the Heritage Lottery Fund "Life in Common" bid.

Assist with the further development of Beaulieu Road Sale Yard to meet modern standards (Recommendation 2.16)

Recent progress

- 2.15 Authority staff have been working with the New Forest Livestock Society and New Forest Trust to identify and apply for sources of funding for this project.

Immediate response

- 2.16 Match funding has been provisionally allocated to help with the financing of any capital works.

Support the setting up and continued support of a young commoners group (Recommendation 2.17)

Immediate response

- 2.17 A small annual budget has been allocated to support this recommendation.

Review the current Commoners Dwellings Scheme with respect to:

- **Faster application process with improved transparency**
- **Greater flexibility within selection criteria, whilst keeping firm principles**
- **Further research and definition of the needs of commoners both in terms of domestic living and commoning activity**
- **Affordability in terms of land and construction costs**
- **Post application guidance – e.g. guidance with rateable value, IHT issues (Recommendation 3.1)**

Recent progress

- 2.18 Following the transfer of the scheme to the Authority, an initial review has been carried out to identify and implement opportunities to improve the application process and provide greater flexibility in the selection criteria. Further work on the outstanding recommendations will be carried out in response to the Review. A project to produce generic designs for affordable commoners dwellings has been developed with the Forestry Commission and will be completed by spring 2008.

Review current planning policies to ensure that they:

- **Support the upgrading of existing facilities to ensure that commoners holdings can remain viable**
- **Support the provision of agriculturally orientated buildings used in connection with commoning activity**

▪ **Recognise the relationship between ancillary rural trades and the viability of commoning enterprises (Recommendation 3.2)**

Recent progress

- 2.19 Discussions are being held with the National Farmers Union and the Authority's Farming Panel to set up training sessions for development control staff to help them to better understand the requirements for farming and commoning.

Immediate response

- 2.20 These sessions will be adapted to take account of the issues raised by the Commoning Review.

Commission further research to identify the amount, use and nature of back-up land and to ensure planning policy wherever possible, protects land used regularly for back-up land from other uses (Recommendation 3.8)

Recent progress

- 2.21 Discussions are being held with the Verderers to analyse comprehensive data currently held on back-up land. It is expected that this could provide an evidence base to help influence planning policy in this area.

Employ a clear set of guidelines to educate and inform the public about commoning, identify a range of audiences who need to be approached, focus the messages on a range of subject areas appropriate to the audience being addressed (Recommendations 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

- 2.22 Authority staff have been involved in a number of initiatives including an Awareness Panel focusing on commoning (shortly to be located at various visitor locations around the Forest), education Fact Sheets being prepared for students and teachers, a recent meeting of the Educators' Forum in the Verderers' Court and a 'virtual pony game' in the Fun Zone of the Authority website. Further work will be required to co-ordinate and gain agreement on how best to take forward the recommendations in partnership with other Forest organisations.

Next steps

- 2.23 Paragraphs 2.4 – 2.22 outline where the Authority is able to make an immediate response to the Review e.g. allocating funding or leading on new initiatives. They also summarise where the Authority has recently carried out work which will help deliver the Review recommendations.

However, further more detailed work will be required to consider how the Authority working in partnership with other Forest organisations can progress all of the recommendations and incorporate them into the National Park Management Plan.

- 2.24 To this end it is suggested that a series of meetings is set up with key partners to discuss how this might be achieved. Prior to this, a meeting will be held with members to discuss the outcomes of the review and potential ways forward. The aim is to hold these discussions over the next couple of months and a progress report will be brought to the Authority by March 2008. In the meantime, the Review will be used as a mandate to inform ongoing work to support commoning in the New Forest.

Recommendations:

- 1. To welcome and congratulate the hard work of the commoners in producing the New Forest Review and to confirm areas for immediate action.**
- 2. To set up a series of meetings to agree how best to progress the Review recommendations and report back on progress by March 2008.**

3 Forest Friendly Farming and New Forest LEADER

Background

- 3.1 Forest Friendly Farming was set up by the New Forest Committee in autumn 2000 with an overall aim to 'secure sustainable land management which maintains the special qualities of the New Forest'. Following a large stakeholder workshop in January 2001, Forest Friendly Farming was launched with a locally derived vision, to be completed within a five year period and with a view to securing the majority of funding through the EU LEADER+ programme (see **Annex 2**).
- 3.2 The Forest Friendly Farming name or 'identity' was used to unite the diverse range of mechanisms and people, including key individuals and local groups, who have been instrumental in taking forward the project together with relevant Forest organisations and local businesses. Fundamental to this was the grass roots approach to the project which the name Forest Friendly Farming was used to signify.
- 3.3 Funding to deliver the project was secured in 2002-03 through a variety of mechanisms including the former Countryside Stewardship Scheme but principally through the EU LEADER+ programme, which provided an ideal model for management of the project due to its philosophy of a bottom up approach to local rural development issues.

- 3.4 Fifty two projects and over 60 grants have been supported since LEADER+ funding came on stream in June 2002. These range from research into affordable housing for commoners to the rebuild of the pony sale yard at Beaulieu Road. Community led groups set up at the original Forest Friendly Farming workshop have gone on to achieve considerable success e.g. the New Forest Pony Publicity Group, which has seen their work result in increased prices for native New Forest ponies.
- 3.5 Individual projects have been completed alongside the development of an integrated advice and support service which is provided by a dedicated 'Forest Friendly Farming' team. Two posts providing support for local produce initiatives are hosted by New Forest District Council and two posts providing farm conservation advice are hosted by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. Business advice is provided through a delegated grant scheme run by the local Enterprise Agency. These services are targeted at commoners, farmers, local producers and allied rural businesses and include:
- On farm advice
 - Small conservation grants
 - Support for national agri-environment and support schemes
 - Local produce development support
 - Local produce marketing advice
 - Origin approved promotional label for the New Forest
 - Business advice
 - Business grants
 - Training grants.
- 3.6 The original vision for Forest Friendly Farming now requires updating and the LEADER+ funded advice and support service will end in summer 2008. It is therefore timely and appropriate to review the successes and outcomes of LEADER+ and to review the future direction of Forest Friendly Farming, alongside the recommendations from the Commoning Review. This will be part of the focus of meetings planned to inform the process of taking forward the Commoning Review. The discussions will need to take account of significant changes within the New Forest since Forest Friendly Farming was first set up. These are the demise of the New Forest Committee, English Nature, Defra's Rural Development Service and the Countryside Agency and the setting up of the National Park Authority and Natural England, and the imminent end of the 2002-2008 LEADER+ programme.

Future directions

- 3.7 Following a successful expression of interest for the 2008-2013 LEADER programme led by the Authority, work to develop objectives for the full application is progressing and a series of workshops will be held in October to identify a more detailed work programme. The recommendations of the Commoning Review will help inform this process.

Should this bid be successful, it is expected that the new LEADER programme could provide a vehicle for future support of successful Forest Friendly Farming initiatives. The long term future of local farm advisory support services will need to be considered further with Natural England and relevant partners.

- 3.8 Experience has shown that aligning the LEADER objectives and development plan (required for all LEADER applications) with Forest Friendly Farming objectives has resulted in a focused and successful programme. More closely aligning the co-ordination and development of Forest Friendly Farming with the strategic role played by the New Forest LEADER Local Action Group further strengthens delivery and ensures that the grass-roots philosophy of the project remains at the heart of the programme. It is therefore suggested that in future and dependent on a successful LEADER application, management of Forest Friendly Farming and the programme management of New Forest LEADER become one and the same and are more clearly branded to reflect this. This could ensure continued funding and a clear and efficient management structure with grass roots control at its helm.
- 3.9 The aim of the new LEADER bid is “to increase the economic and environmental sustainability of communities, rural micro-businesses and the forestry and farming sectors within the New Forest”. The bid, which is expected to amount to £2.25 million from 2007 - 2013, centres around five objectives:
1. To provide grant support to foresters, farmers and micro-businesses for projects which encourage the best use of natural resources
 2. To provide advice and support to foresters, farmers and micro-businesses by encouraging new opportunities for employment, training and skills development in order to increase economic and environmental sustainability
 3. To further develop existing New Forest quality assurance schemes in order to ensure long term viability
 4. To increase renewable energy markets and the profitability of wood fuel in the New Forest
 5. To provide support for rural communities to develop new community facilities or make improvements to existing facilities.

3.10 The current timetable for the submission of an application for LEADER funding is as follows:

15 -19 October 2007	Workshops on local produce, sustainable woodland management and facilities for sustainable communities
1 November 2007	SEEDA deadline for confirmation of membership of LAG
30 November 2007	SEEDA deadline for confirmation of accountable body
18 January 2008	Deadline for receipt of full application
9 -11 April 2008	LAG presentation to SEEDA selection panel
23 - 25 April 2008	SEEDA selection panel reviewing all applications
Early May 2008	Successful LAGs to receive approval
July / August 2008	Funding available for successful LAGs

3.11 LEADER funding can provide significant benefits to the National Park, in terms of further developing integrated land management within the New Forest. However, there are a number of risks and issues associated with utilising LEADER funds. These are:

- The risk of not securing additional funding for essential work, resulting in the need to identify new funding sources
- Securing match funding for core work
- Agreeing which organisation will be the accountable body for the programme (discussions are currently being held with New Forest District Council to resolve this)
- Ensuring that sufficient funds are available through the LEADER programme properly to manage the implementation of the programme i.e. administration and project development and support
- Ensuring that hosting organisations have sufficient capacity in terms of office space, line management etc for new posts.

3.12 As the bid is developed, these risks will need to be managed. The question of responsibility for the administration of the programme is currently being discussed and a proposal will need to be approved by New Forest District Council cabinet and the Authority's Resources and Policy Committee in November / early December.

- 3.13 Following analysis and review of the Forest Friendly Farming initiative and as the future direction becomes clearer with LEADER and Natural England, work to identify and develop a work programme to guide the Authority in supporting sustainable land management in the National Park can be finalised. This work programme will be closely linked to the Commoning Review, the emerging LEADER programme as agreed with the Local Action Group and the development of the National Park Management Plan.

Recommendation:

- 3. To approve the timetable and process for the submission of an application to the LEADER programme subject to agreeing satisfactory arrangements for managing and administrating the programme.**

New Forest Commoning Review Recommendations

Open Forest grazing needs and conservation, financial returns and young people

- 2.1 Support the continuation of current schemes which provide direct support to commoners for grazing their stock on the Open Forest ensuring any benefits are available to young commoners
- 2.2 Support the continuation of locally tailored farm advisory support services to ensure that commoners can utilise agri-environment and farm support schemes
- 2.3 Support the continuation of existing schemes where these can demonstrate added value and business efficiencies to commoning enterprises i.e. New Forest Pony Publicity Group, Forest Friendly Farming Business Grant Scheme, Forest Friendly Farming Training Grant Scheme, New Forest Marque and New Forest Farmers and Producers Markets
- 2.4 Explore opportunities to review the Defra Single Payment Scheme
- 2.5 Consult with major landowners to investigate and develop opportunities for the use of land for back-up grazing and affordable homes for commoners
- 2.6 Provide financial and technical resources to support regular campaigns to reduce the speed of motorists travelling on the Forest
- 2.7 Reduce collection costs of fallen stock on Forest roads
- 2.8 To encourage Defra to consider a special derogation for the New Forest for the identification of horses
- 2.9 Support the continuation of the Stallion Scheme including raising awareness of the scheme with the general public
- 2.10 Encourage commoners to breed and register full-bred New Forest ponies
- 2.11 Support the continuation of the current level of the Forestry Commission annual burning programme, providing resources if necessary to complete within the required time period
- 2.12 Provide further assistance to investigate and develop markets for the bi-products of bracken cutting
- 2.13 Work with the Forestry Commission to implement a programme for the re-instatement of lost forest lawns

- 2.14 Assist in the defence of encroachments on the Open Forest, including raising awareness of the problem with local landowners and developers
- 2.15 Assist with the upkeep of forest fencing used in the rounding up of Forest stock
- 2.16 Assist with the further development of Beaulieu Road Sale Yard to meet modern standards
- 2.17 Support the setting up and continued support of a young commoners' group

Planning, housing and back-up land

- 3.1 Review the current Commoners Dwellings Scheme with respect to:
 - Faster application process with improved transparency
 - Greater flexibility within selection criteria, whilst keeping firm principles
 - Further research and definition of the needs of commoners both in terms of domestic living and commoning activity
 - Affordability in terms of land and construction costs
 - Post application guidance – e.g. guidance with rateable value, IHT issues
- 3.2 Support the acquisition of land and holdings which can be tied to commoning through a range of schemes
- 3.3 Develop a range of full/part ownership and rental schemes between commoners and local estates, landowners and relevant authorities with land holdings
- 3.4 Develop partnerships between authorities to make the best use of sites for commoning
- 3.5 Support the development of schemes to allow freehold properties to be entered into trust for future commoning generations
- 3.6 Investigate whether there are opportunities to bracket commoners' holdings with farms in terms of inheritance tax
- 3.7 Review current planning policies to ensure that they:
 - Support the upgrading of existing facilities to ensure that commoners holdings can remain viable
 - Support the provision of agriculturally orientated buildings used in connection with commoning activity
 - Recognise the relationship between ancillary rural trades and the viability of commoning enterprises

- 3.8 Commission further research to identify the amount, use and nature of back-up land and to ensure planning policy wherever possible, protects land used regularly for back-up land from other uses

Education and awareness raising including conflicts between recreation, commoning and conservation

- 4.1 Employ a clear set of guidelines to educate and inform the public about commoning. These are to:

- Adopt an integrated approach to education and information
- Use straightforward and clear messages, including visual impact
- Conduct continuous campaigns, not carried out once and forgotten
- Update messages on a regular basis to reflect changing circumstances (e.g. seasons)
- Integrate the use of new media for dissemination: especially TV and radio
- Make greater use of face-to-face contact (e.g. commoners giving talks to campers)
- Send out regular and frequent press releases regarding stock and commoning issues
- Employ mediation to avert conflict
- Educate those who do not know and give warning information for those who do not care (e.g. your car/self could be at risk)
- Do not employ too many negative messages
- Introduce the idea of 'rights' and 'responsibilities'
- Employ messages that are accessible to all
- Use not just the threat, but the use of enforcement where appropriate
- Monitor the effectiveness of campaigns

- 4.2 Identify a range of audiences who need to be approached

- Visitors and tourists
- Residents of the New Forest area
- Local businesses that operate in the New Forest area and need to have regard for the different conditions that apply to it (e.g. driving schools, delivery companies, estate agents)
- Local businesses that provide services to the area's visitors (e.g. camp sites, hotels, restaurants)
- Local school and college students, as well as those engaged in life long learning
- People who drive within or across the open forest
- Young commoners who need to be encouraged about the importance of what they do
- Management and conservation organisations with a remit in the New Forest

4.3 Focus the messages on a range of subject areas appropriate to the audience being addressed

- How to behave in the New Forest (as in general countryside advice, and things that are specific to the New Forest)
- How to deal when in contact with commoners' stock
- The rights and responsibilities of commoners and those who come in contact with them
- How to drive in the New Forest
- The rights and responsibilities of people whose land abuts the open forest

Forest Friendly Farming Vision – January 2001

1. The unique character and traditions of the New Forest are understood and valued by all.
2. Mutually beneficial partnerships exist between those who work the commons, farms and woods and other local economies (e.g. tourism and retail industries).
3. Local land based industries are thriving businesses which will attract future generations.
4. Commoning is underpinned by tailored government support.
5. Local land managers have access to affordable housing.
6. New Forest stock are valuable, providing viable economic returns for their owners.
7. Forest Friendly products can easily be produced, processed, packaged and distributed within the New Forest.
8. Forest Friendly products and crafts are sought after by residents, visitors and a wider public by post, home delivery and in local shops.
9. The New Forest one-stop shop provides information, advice, advocacy and training on all aspects of Forest Friendly Farming. There is a Forest Friendly farming website.
10. A New Forest charitable trust provides a mechanism for residents and visitors to financially support Forest Friendly Farming.