

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 26 MARCH 2009

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 29 January 2009 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in January and February.

Recommendation:

To note the report

Paper:

NFNPA 289/09: Cover paper

Contact:

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

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**AUTHORITY MEETING – 26 MARCH 2009****CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

- 1 This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 29 January 2009 except planning development control and enforcement which covers activity in January and February.

Members

- 2 Some members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events:
- Tour of New Forest Centre, 16 February
 - Planning Development Control Committee, 17 February
 - Tree Preservation Order Objection Panel, 17 February
 - Campaign for National Parks, Trustees meeting, 17 February
 - Boundary markers and signage advisory group meeting, 20 February
 - meeting with Cllr Thornber, Hampshire County Council, 24 February
 - National Park Plan Working Groups briefing meeting, 25 February
 - Access Forum, 2 March
 - Unveiling of new Canada Road sign, Wellow, 27 February
 - National Park Plan Zoning Working Group, 3 March
 - Meeting with representatives from One Voice, 3 March
 - Meeting with Paul Carter, Chairman of SEERA, 4 March
 - SEERA Plenary, 4 March
 - National Park Plan Service Villages and Housing Working Group, 4 March
 - New Forest Consultative Panel, 5 March
 - Resources and Performance Committee, 10 March
 - National Park Plan Traffic and Transport Working Group, 11 March
 - Meeting with representatives from the Meyrick Estate, 12 March
 - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 17 March
 - National Park Plan Socio-economic Working Group, 18 March
 - Meeting with Barbara Follet, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Minister for East of England, organised by ENPAA, 19 March
 - Association of Parish and Town Councils, 19 March
 - Lymington and Pennington Town Council Annual meeting, 25 March
 - Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing, 25 March

3 Forthcoming activities include:

- Discussion about noise reduction at Bournemouth Airport, 30 March
- ENPAA, 1 April
- National Park Plan Horse Keeping Working Group, 1 April
- Meeting with Julian Lewis, 3 April
- Talk at Friends of St Barbe Museum AGM, 3 April
- Planning Development Control Tour, 7 or 9 April
- Planning Development Control Committee, 21 April
- Possibly, National Park Plan Service Villages and Housing Working Group, 21 April
- Possibly, National Park Plan Zoning Working Group, 22 April
- Possibly, National Park Plan Socio-economic Working Group, 23 April
- ANPA workshop on water management, Broads Authority, 23-24 April
- New Forest Association AGM, 25 April
- Resources and Performance Committee, 27 April
- Possibly, National Park Plan Horse Keeping Working Group, 29 April
- National Park Plan Traffic and Transport Group, 6 May
- New Forest Consultative Panel, 7 May
- Standards Committee, 11 May
- Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing, 12 May
- Planning Development Control Committee, 19 May
- National Park Plan Recreation Working Group, date tbc

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

Conservation, Recreation and Sustainable Development

4 Partnership working

Funding

- Officers attended a training session on the State Aid regulations, organised by SEEDA for all of the LEADER groups. These regulations have implications for any public funding provided to businesses or community groups for commercial activities.
- The External Funding Officer attended a meeting of the South East Environmental Funding Network which featured a presentation and discussion about potential Interreg 4b (transnational European Union grants) projects. Officers now investigating the option of being a partner in an Irish-led Climate Change project which will look at regional resilience including the effects of coastal change and potential new wildfire risks.

- Officers have provided advice to New Forest Produce in their development of an application for LEADER funding and their business plan.
- Officers met with the Community Affairs Manager and Adviser at ExxonMobil to find out more about their funding and volunteering schemes and to discuss their potential involvement in a number of Authority projects.
- The Authority has been successful in securing a further £12,000 from the Crown Estates' Marine Communities Fund towards the New Forest Maritime Archaeology Project. The two new posts for this project – a Project Officer and an Outreach and Education Officer are being advertised at present and interviews will be held during the last week of March 2009.
- Officers have provided advice to a number of groups seeking funding for community projects including Woodgreen Community Shop, Lepe and Exbury Parish Council, and the New Forest Centre (for the New Forest Film Archive Project).
- The Authority has been involved in investigating the feasibility of developing retail sales, carbon offset schemes and donation schemes, the results of which were discussed by the Income Generation Group at its recent meeting.

5 Corporate Plan

Landscape (C1)

- Officers met with Network Rail's subcontractor at Beaulieu Road Station to discuss tree felling along the main railway line.

Nature Conservation (C3)

- Officers attended a consultation event organised by contractors for the South East Biodiversity Forum. The Forum is producing Biodiversity Opportunity Maps for the south-east region which link to policies within the south-east plan and are of importance for spatial planning.
- The Authority's Ecologist also attended the Solent Forum nature conservation sub-group meeting during January which considered ongoing research relating to recreational/visitor pressure impacts – particularly to birds - on the Solent coast.
- A Working Group meeting was held on the New Forest Biodiversity Action Plan and the Ecologist chaired the Hampshire Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan Forum. The meeting agreed that local authority ecologists would review the effectiveness of 1-APP biodiversity checklist, in particular

awareness and use by Development Control Planners and applicants. Natural England is due to produce new guidance on consultations and protected species within the planning process

- National Indicator 197 is a new government indicator for the Local Government Performance Framework. This was the main topic at a conference organised at the end of the month by the Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership, led by Hampshire County Council. The indicator measures the number of local wildlife sites (e.g. those known locally as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation or SINC within development plans) in positive nature conservation management. There is a role for the Authority and our partners in targeting advice and resources with other key agencies such as Natural England to support and work with land owners and land managers.

Archaeology (C6)

- Since November, the Archaeologist has received over 160 archaeological enquiries, 30 of which relate to potential new sites and scheduled monuments.
- Work continued on Farm Environment Plans and responses to historic environment data requests for Higher Level Stewardship has continued including those for the Beaulieu Estate, Pennington and Keyhaven Marshes and a data request for the National Trust land at Foxbury. Forestry Commission felling licence consultations were also processed to establish proximity to known archaeological sites.
- Talks on the archaeology of the New Forest were given in November to the Lower Test Valley Archaeological Study Group in Romsey, at the inaugural meeting of the New Forest History and Archaeology Group at the Lyndhurst Centre, and the Southampton City Museum Society, and at the New Forest Consultative Panel in January. Frank Green also featured in the BBC Country File TV programme about the New Forest. In February, Frank gave a number of talks to Students at Southampton University, members of the Somborne and District Society and for students attending a day school focusing on the archaeology of the New Forest National Park.
- A site visit with staff from Hampshire County Council was made to the Pennington marshes to assess possibilities for restoring one of the docks/canals associated with the former sea-salt trade. The aim is to improve the wild-life habitat as a special project under Higher Level Stewardship.
- Officers attended a workshop on the historic environment of the Western Solent for the Shoreline Management Plan at the

National Oceanographic Centre where methods for assessing archaeological and heritage sites and features were agreed.

- Site visits were made to view the current woodland surveys in the Oakley Enclosure led by Anthony Pasmore and also at Roydon Woods. Further archaeological survey work at Roydon may possibly attract special project funding under Higher Level Stewardship.

Building Conservation and Design (C7)

- The review of conservation areas in the National Park as set out in **Corporate Plan Objective C7** is continuing. The conservation areas of Brockenhurst, Sway, Ashlett Creek and Keyhaven have now been reviewed and following extended public consultation and a valuable response, proposals will be reported to the May meeting of the Authority.
- Discussions have continued with the owners of the collapsed listed timber framed barn near Hyde. An application for the reconstruction of the barn and its reuse as a home/work dwelling together with the restoration of the other listed buildings on the site has been received.
- Officers have contributed to developing policy on behalf of the wider National Park family as part of a working group looking at the socio-economic benefits of heritage in National Parks and as part of the group reviewing the Joint Statement on the Historic Environment of 2004. This is a declaration of intent between the national parks and the historic environment agencies, to further the sustainable management, public understanding, access to and enjoyment of National Parks by appropriate means.
- The Authority has also had involvement with an English Heritage workshop looking at historic environment legislative reform.
- Work is continuing on the first conservation area-specific management plan which will be for the Western Escarpment conservation area and on the preparation of a draft Building Design Guide, for consultation later in 2009. (**Corporate Plan Objective A4**).

Traffic, transport and tourism (U2)

- The Authority hosted a workshop at South Efford House with Hampshire County Council and Dorset County Council to discuss the Dorset Rural Roads Protocol – a new initiative to take a more sensitive approach to managing the impact of highways (including signs) on the character of rural areas.

- Discussions have continued with Hampshire County Council and New Forest District Council about the next steps for the New Forest Tour.

Recreation management and access (U1 and 6)

- Officers are analysing the consultation responses received on the draft Recreation Management Strategy and planning the process of drawing up options for revisions and improvements and the workshops that will consider these. **(U1)**
- The first drafts of the 'accessibility information project' have been received. The project involves the production of detailed information about accessibility at two pilot sites – Blackwater and Lymington/Keyhaven. The information is held in a database, which when completed, will be available to the public through the internet, and used to download up-to-date information in a basic format which can be printed off by the user, as required. Officers are currently awaiting feedback from user groups on the information and subject to resources the work will be expanded to cover other sites in the Forest.
- A meeting was held to discuss improving the information provided to Small Grants Scheme (for countryside access) applicants. Lyndhurst Parish Council's application for a leaflet describing a circular walk around the village was approved, and the Parish Council was advised on some aspects of the leaflet content.
- Hampshire County Council has advised the Authority of a new walking route that is being created along the old railway line near Breamore. This is a welcome initiative and it is proposed that funding be provided to assist with the installation of a new bridge and the removal of a large spoil heap from the surface of the path.
- The Authority was represented at a meeting with Defra to discuss National Park Authorities' proposed amendments to Part 9 of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill, and provided comments to Natural England on its draft scheme for Coastal Access with particular emphasis on the operation of access restrictions and exclusions.
- Officers have visited various sites to look at potential access improvements in Roydon Woods and Linford, and to provide a written description for the Beaulieu to Buckler's Hard route which will be promoted as one of the National Protected Landscapes' 60th Anniversary Walks.
- Officers attended a meeting to discuss the potential replacement of the A35 bridge over the old-railway line at Holmsley and how a cycle route might be incorporated into the replacement crossing;

this will hopefully be able to form part of the Sustrans Connect2 nationwide cycle route improvements.

Sustainable development (SE1)

- Regular liaison meetings have been held with New Forest District Council Officers to discuss joint working on economic development and in particular the future of the New Forest Marque.
- Officers also attended and supported a New Forest Marque discussion event for members in advance of an application for LEADER funding.
- Five projects have been developed for submission to the March Sustainable Development Fund grant panel. Officers have also provided project development support to aid implementation of a number of ongoing projects, including the installation of a biomass boiler system at Lyndhurst Community Centre.

Information and Visitor Services

6 Corporate Plan

- A 2009 events booklet has been printed, distributed and added to the website. It details National Park Authority-led events, partnership events with which the Authority is involved and other organisations which provide public events. **(U3)**
- Officers are looking forward to the return of Andy Brennan who will lead on the use of the mobile information and interpretation unit (the National Park Explorer) from March/April 2009. **(U3)**
- The 'forest trumps' game is now live on the Funzone of the website. This highlights the special qualities of various iconic New Forest animals, buildings and sites. **(U4)**
- Recent school contact has included a youth enterprise event at Brockenhurst College, parent information sessions at primary schools and pushchair walks in Lyndhurst and East Boldre.

7 Partnership working

- Following the successful training in 2008, a joint training programme has been planned for seasonal rangers and volunteers from delivery organisations within the Park during the week of 30 March - 3 April 2009. **(U5)**
- A drifts code of conduct leaflet to support the Verderers' information leaflet has been drafted. **(U1)**

- Joint training has taken place for 35 front-of-house staff and volunteers from the Authority, Visitor Information Centres, New Forest District Council, Forestry Commission, Local Information Points and Lepe Country Park. **(U3)**
- Leanne Atkinson, will return as seasonal Coastal Ranger (joint with Hampshire County Council) in March enabling the Authority to engage with local people and visitors along the coastline of the National Park. **(U5)**
- A joint initiative with the Forestry Commission to highlight litter and feeding of ponies in schools has resulted in invitations to at least 13 primary schools to do assemblies and follow-up sessions in the classroom. **(U3)**
- The 2009 Spring Clean litter pick, which was jointly organised by officers from the Authority, New Forest District Council and the Forestry Commission, attracted an increased number of community groups who took part in the events planned for the initial week of 7 - 15 March. Staff from the three organisations worked together in a joint litter pick on 13 March. **(U3)**
- Work has continued for the spring edition of *New Forest Today* magazine published jointly with New Forest District Council and the Forestry Commission and for the 2009 edition of *Forest Focus* jointly with the Forestry Commission **(A1, U3)**
- Work to support a funding bid to SEEDA for a sustainable tourism project is progressing. If successful the project will promote sustainable tourism across nine South East Protected Landscapes, linked to the special qualities of each. The bid has the support of New Forest District Council Tourism Service and the New Forest Tourism Association. **(SE1)**

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)**

Planning Policy

9 Corporate Plan

Corporate Plan Objective A3: Management Plan and Objective A4: Spatial Planning Policies

- Copies of all 9,724 responses to the draft Plan have been copied for public inspection at South Efford House and were available from 19 January 2009 onwards (with personal details removed).
- Richard Lemon was interviewed by the BBC's Countryfile team on the draft National Park Plan as part of a programme broadcast at the end of January on the New Forest.
- The team's work during February and March focussed on continuing analysis of the consultation responses to the draft National Park Plan and preparing for and hosting the series of topic based working groups. A series of five working groups covering Zoning; Service Villages and Housing; Traffic and Transport; Socio-Economic Issues; and Recreational Horse Keeping are taking place. Between 20–25 organisations have been invited to each group based on a review of the consultation comments made, and the need for a balanced discussion. Each meeting is chaired by a lead Authority member, supported by another member and staff from the Policy and Plans team. The first round of working group meetings have taken place for Zoning, Service Villages and Housing, Traffic and Transport and Socio-Economic issues. The first Recreational Horse Keeping Working Group meeting is taking place at the beginning of April. All of the meetings held so far have been well attended and the meeting notes will be placed on the Authority's website.
- National Park Authority members were briefed on the format of the Working Groups and the other elements of the Authority's National Park Plan engagement strategy on 25 February. This engagement will also include a Ward Councillors meeting, workshops with invited representatives from Parish Councils grouped in four quadrants of the forest, Parish Council hosted meetings, and meetings with key partners and statutory bodies.
- The team met officers from Hampshire County Council to discuss the transport policies in the National Park Plan. The New Forest Access Forum and the Consultative Panel also received an update on progress on the National Park Plan and the Recreation Management Strategy.

10 Other work

- Senior officers from the Authority met with Christchurch Borough Council and the operators of Bournemouth Airport at one of the regular meetings between the three bodies. The Authority received an update on the redevelopment of the Airport and provided initial results from the aircraft noise monitoring work.
- The Policy and Plans team met with policy planners from Test Valley Borough Council on 27 January to discuss the respective Local Development Frameworks, as well as the Borough Council's proposals for a new forest park north of Southampton, which the Authority has supported in principle.
- The Authority responded to the City of Southampton Core Strategy (Submission) document. The Authority welcomed the Council's acknowledgement of the need for the provision of high quality open spaces to alleviate recreational pressures on the New Forest, and the inclusion of a specific policy on the Port of Southampton.
- The team were represented at the Environment Agency's River Basin Management Seminar held at Lyndhurst on 12 February.
- Richard Lemon attended the off-shore wind energy presentation by the planning consultancy Terence O'Rourke on behalf of the Crown Estate.

11 Development Control

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

- **Planning applications: received 61.** Applications were registered within three working days following receipt.
- **Planning decisions: 82 issued**, of which 58 were approved (71%) and 24 were refused (29%). Three applications were withdrawn. Nine (11%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 20 January 2009.
- 80% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 75% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).
- **Live planning applications: 277 at 31 January**, compared with 302 at 31 December.
- **Appeals: Ten new appeals** received this month. There were five appeal decisions in January, three were dismissed and two were allowed.

- **Enforcement: 54 new enforcement cases** were registered in January and 48 cases were closed. There were 289 outstanding enforcement cases at the end of the month. Five Enforcement Notices were served during January.
- The tree team received 13 consultations from Development Control in respect of trees on development sites, 10 consultations were returned within the 21 day target. **(Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7)**
- Thirty six tree work applications were registered and 43 determined. 100% were determined within the 8 week target date. No Tree Preservation Orders were made.

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

- **Planning applications: received 65.** Applications were registered within three working days following receipt.
- **Planning decisions: 66 issued**, of which 45 were approved (68%) and 21 were refused (32%). Five applications were withdrawn. Twelve (18%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 17 February 2009.
- 72% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 67% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).
- **Live planning applications: 267 at 28 February**, compared with 277 at 31 January.
- **Appeals: Seven new appeals** received this month. There were three appeal decisions in February, two were dismissed and one was allowed with conditions.
- **Enforcement: 34 new enforcement cases** were registered in February and 30 cases were closed. There were 293 outstanding enforcement cases at the end of the month. Two Enforcement Notices were served during February.
- The tree team received 21 consultations from Development Control in respect of trees on development sites, 17 consultations were returned within the 21 day target. There are four still live, in time. **(Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7)**
- Twenty four tree work applications were registered and 28 determined. 98% were determined within the 8 week target date. Two Tree Preservation Orders were made.

12 **Member Services**

- The Member Services section has been involved in providing support to meetings of the Authority and its Committees, including a meeting of the Tree Preservation Order Objection Panel, and followed up on actions arising from these meetings. The team has been monitoring and assisting with responses to complaints and requests received under the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations, as well as the Data Protection Act, and is in the process of producing a complete guide for staff involved in answering requests. The team also facilitates meetings of the New Forest Consultative Panel.
- Following a demonstration of a new complaints logging and monitoring system using Sharepoint, Member Services have been working with the ICT Section towards introducing this system for handling complaints with effect from 1 April 2009. The team also assisted the Monitoring Officer in securing feedback on speaking procedures at meetings of the Planning Development Control Committee in preparation for a report to the Authority in May.
- The section has assisted in facilitating a programmed audit of records management by the Authority's internal auditors. The Authority's data protection registration has been renewed. The team has assisted in the administrative actions arising from the appointment of two new members, and has been arranging for their training and induction.

Corporate Services

13 **Human resources**

- As of 28 February 2009 there are 68 members of staff or 62.42 full time equivalents, of whom 15 are part time and 6 are on a fixed term contract.
- Jane Brown, Monitoring and Enforcement Officer, left the Authority on 4 January. We wish her well in her new job.
- Katie Crabb joined the Authority on 25 February for three months as the interim Head of Performance and Administration. Katie has been seconded from Hampshire County Council.
- Rob Aldred joined the Authority on 3 March 2009 as a Monitoring and Enforcement Officer in Development Control.
- Recruitment is in progress for a permanent Head of Performance and Administration, a GIS Technician (one-year fixed-term) and a Climate Change Officer (one-year fixed-term).

- Recruitment is also in progress for two two-year fixed-term posts created, with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, to deliver the maritime archaeology project along the New Forest coast (see bullet 3, page 5).
- Recruitment to the Head of Communications and Head of Policy and Plans posts was unsuccessful. An interim Head of Policy and Plans, Jeff Clarke, has been appointed for a period of up to six months.
- Aside from a heavy workload on recruitment, the HR team continues to prepare final revisions to HR policies for Resources and Performance Committee approval, to develop a competence framework to support the staff appraisal process and to work on staff training and development issues.

14 **ICT**

- Improvements to the look, feel and content of the website continue on a regular basis including the addition of information marking the 60th anniversary of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. **(A1)**
- The electronic document and records management pilot project (to determine the suitability of Microsoft SharePoint as a solution for the Authority) will continue in the Complaints and Consultations areas, but further development has been deferred pending the outcome of a refreshed ICT Strategy, which will be commissioned shortly. **(A1)**
- Migration of data from the existing corporate Access database into the Contact Management System has been completed. Further testing of the system is planned, along with work to begin importing data from other sources. **(A1)**

15 **Finance and performance**

- In the third quarter 97.50% of suppliers invoices were paid within 30 days (target: 95%).
- Work has begun on preparing the 2009/10 Corporate Plan on a rolled forward, transitional basis. The aim is for a new style of Plan to be prepared for 2010/11 and beyond - reflecting the vision and objectives in the Park Plan. This approach was approved by the Resources and Performance Committee at its meeting on 10 March 2009.
- Katie Crabb has begun work on reviewing the Authority's performance management and monitoring arrangements with the aim both of simplifying them while aligning them more closely with financial and project monitoring arrangements.

16 **Accommodation**

- As part of the Defra joint project to secure a new permanent Headquarters for the Authority, consultants are working with staff to determine the space planning and design requirement for a new building. This work needs to be completed before building design can begin.

Recommendation

To note the report.