

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**AUTHORITY MEETING – 28 FEBRUARY 2008**

**SIGNAGE AND ANIMAL ACCIDENT REDUCTION STRATEGIES FOR THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK**

**Report by:** Nigel Matthews, Head of Visitor Services

**Summary:**

This paper introduces two key strategies, their associated action plans and the process through which they have been produced.

The **Signage Strategy** aims to establish a framework which will guide proposals and action to reduce signage clutter, encourage better presentation of necessary existing signs, and improve the design of any new signs within the National Park. A draft version was presented to the Authority in June 2007 and has been amended following comments received then, and subsequently from New Forest District Council officers. The Verderers gave their broad support for it in August 2007.

The **Animal Accident Reduction Strategy** summarises the background to road traffic accidents involving commoners' animals and provides a framework for organisations to work together to reduce the number of such accidents in the New Forest.

Both strategies have been drawn up in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and both action plans necessitate the commitment of these organisations if they are to be carried out. They are presented together because signs are often used to highlight the danger of animal accidents.

Approval by the Authority will demonstrate the Authority's commitment to these issues and to the specific actions on which it can lead or assist.

The proposed replacement for the large shield-shaped signs has been brought to the Authority at the request of the Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group. It has been the subject of long discussions amongst numerous stakeholders but now has the backing of the New Forest Road Safety Council. Approval of this design by the Authority should enable various related signage issues to be progressed by Hampshire County Council.

## **Recommendations:**

### **To**

- 1 approve the Signage Strategy and recommend its adoption by other organisations;**
- 2 comment on and note the Animal Accident Reduction Strategy;**
- 3 note and comment on the two action plans;**
- 4 approve the proposed design for a new sign assembly to replace the large shield-shaped signs currently located at the start of routes with high animal accident rates.**

## **Resources:**

Included in 2008 – 2009 budget request:

- £9,000 for animal accident reduction
- £10,000 for sign rationalisation

## **Corporate Plan 2007-2008:**

U3: Reduce the impact of signs through developing and implementing a plan for removal, rationalisation and replacement, incorporating common design elements, wherever possible, working in partnership with the highway authorities.

U2: Develop a new animal accident reduction strategy, in partnership with all stakeholders. Contribute to the implementation of actions arising from the review.

## **Papers:**

<b>NFNPA 234/08:</b>	Cover paper
<b>NFNPA 234/08 Annex 1:</b>	Signage Strategy for the National Park
<b>NFNPA 234/08 Annex 2:</b>	Animal Accident Reduction Strategy
<b>NFNPA 234/08 Annex 3:</b>	Signage Rationalisation Action Plan
<b>NFNPA 234/08 Annex 4:</b>	Animal Accident Reduction Action Plan
<b>NFNPA 234/08 Annex 5:</b>	Animal Accident Warning Sign

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**1 Background to Signage Strategy**

- 1.1 Many highway signs in the National Park appear to be poorly designed, located or maintained.
- 1.2 A desire to reduce the frequency of animal accidents, recent pressure to follow national awareness campaigns and attempts to reduce car-related crime have resulted in signage which does not respect the special qualities of the National Park landscape.

**2 Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group**

- 2.1 The Authority set up a Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) with representation from Authority members and officers, the Verderers, Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council and the Forestry Commission. The Group has met four times to look at underlying principles for signage, proposals for rationalisation of signs and proposals for boundary markers.
- 2.2 The Advisory Group provided a useful forum to consider the various opinions about the effectiveness of different designs of signs conveying the risk of animal accidents, and for finding ways to reduce the number and visual impact of these signs.

**3 Signage Strategy**

- 3.1 The Signage Strategy (**Annex 1**) aims to establish a framework which will guide proposals and action to reduce signage clutter, encourage better presentation of necessary existing signs, and improve the design of any new signs within the National Park. It concentrates on the countryside outside settlements, and primarily on highway signs. It has been developed on the basis of guidance from the Advisory Group and input from other key stakeholders where relevant.

- 3.2 The Strategy is intended for adoption by the key organisations with responsibilities for signage in the National Park (Hampshire County Council, Wiltshire County Council, New Forest District Council, Salisbury District Council and Test Valley Borough Council, together with key landowners such as the Forestry Commission) as well as the Authority.
- 3.3 The Authority has a strategic role in ensuring that signage within the National Park reflects national park purposes by:
- guiding and influencing signage to ensure that the special qualities of the National Park are conserved and enhanced – particularly as regards visual impact;
  - guiding, influencing and in some cases delivering signage which enables people to enjoy and understand the National Park (for example installing boundary markers).
- 3.4 A draft Signage Strategy was presented to the Authority on 28 June 2007. Since then, two aspects of signage have been taken forward. First, agreement between the Advisory Group and the New Forest Road Safety Council has been reached on the basic design of replacement signage for the large shield-shaped signs installed just inside the main entrance points to the Open Forest. Second, Hampshire County Council's audit of signs on the B3054 between Lyndhurst and Dibden Purlieu has been completed. This enabled an assessment to be made of the opportunities to rationalise signs on this typical stretch of New Forest road. Conclusions from both initiatives are included in the Sign Rationalisation Action Plan.
- 3.5 Authority officers will ask each of the key organisations listed in 3.2 above to confirm their adoption of the Strategy and indicate how it will be incorporated into their own policies, strategies or plans for sign maintenance, replacement and rationalisation and any new signage schemes that may become necessary.
- 3.6 Officers will then be able to monitor progress in this documentation and in action on the ground. A review of the response will be done a year after approval by the Authority.

### **Recommendation 1**

**To approve the Signage Strategy (Annex 1) and recommend its adoption by other organisations.**

## **4 Animal Accident Reduction Strategy**

- 4.1 The Animal Accident Reduction Strategy (**Annex 2**) stems, in part, from an earlier strategy drawn up by Hampshire County Council's New Forest Transport Strategy Officer and the Commoners Defence Association.
- 4.2 In March 2007, an Animal Accident Reduction Group was formed, attended by a range of organisations involved in animal accidents. This group drew up a long list of ways in which these accidents could be reduced, including ideas that had been tried in the past and ones that had been considered but rejected. Animal accidents are an important and emotive issue within the New Forest and coordination between stakeholders is important if messages are to be consistent and effects of different initiatives are to be maximised. The strategy aims to help this coordination by setting a framework for organisations to work together to reduce the number of accidents involving commoners' animals in the New Forest. It has the broad support of the Animal Accident Reduction Group.
- 4.3 The Authority recognises that commoners' animals are essential to the New Forest and is well placed to support and guide activities aimed at protecting them. Messages about these animals, including the danger of accidents, are an important aspect of our educational, interpretative and communications work. There are also traffic management and landscape aspects to the issue so the work cuts across several strands of Authority work.
- 4.4 Unless vehicles are physically separated from the animals (which would run counter to the very essence of the New Forest), unavoidable, 'genuine' accidents will continue to occur. However, it should be possible to reduce the number of *avoidable* accidents, and this is where information sharing and joint working between stakeholders (through the Animal Accident Reduction Group) can be effective.

## **Recommendation 2**

### **To comment on and note the Animal Accident Reduction Strategy**

## **5 Action plans**

- 5.1 Both the Sign Rationalisation and Animal Accident Reduction Action Plans draw together a range of actions for which different organisations can take the lead.

- 5.2 The Sign Rationalisation Action Plan (**Annex 3**) supports the Signage Strategy and is largely an Authority document designed to track decisions made and give realistic timescales for progress on the ground.
- 5.3 Hampshire County Council has responsibility for the largest number of signs in the National Park and is keen to work with the Authority in the ways listed. Inevitably, the Council is constrained by its own resources, and in any case, a staged approach using pilot routes is sometimes best. There has been relatively little contact with officers from the other organisations listed so the degree to which they will be able to implement new work programmes is far less certain.
- 5.4 Progress on sign rationalisation will be reported to the Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group.
- 5.5 The Animal Accident Reduction Action Plan (**Annex 4**) which supports the Animal Accident Reduction Strategy is derived from an Excel spreadsheet maintained by the New Forest Transport Strategy Officer. This spreadsheet has a list of actions for each lead organisation, as well as a communal list showing all actions. **Annex 4** shows much of the information in the communal list at the time it was last updated.
- 5.6 Ideally, the Action Plan should have tighter allocation of responsibilities and clear timescales or milestones. This will be addressed at future meetings of the Animal Accident Reduction Group. None of the actions guarantee a huge reduction of animal accidents and, at least in the short term, the Group expects that a series of initiatives is needed. In this respect it is good that the organisations represented have a long term commitment to the issue.
- 5.7 The Authority can lead on only a small proportion of actions in the two action plans. In the last year, it has had notable success in the following projects:
- gaining agreement for the underlying principles within the Signage Strategy;
  - gaining agreement for the removal of the 'feeding of animals is prohibited' signs and the small shield-shaped speed reminder signs (total of 119 signs removed);
  - negotiating a much less obtrusive sign to replace the large shield signs warning of animal accidents (see item 6 and recommendation 4 below);
  - playing a key role in establishing the B3054 as a pilot route for furthering widespread rationalisation of signs across the National Park;
  - gaining agreement for 50 boundary markers and signs around the perimeter of the National Park and completing installation of the first of these;

- production and distribution of animal emergency hotline cards;
  - production of temporary, triangular 'animal casualty here' signs for Agisters to leave at the site of accidents;
  - inclusion of animal accident information in various other media, including the Fun Zone on the Authority website, Park Life, Forest Focus, press releases and radio interviews.
- 5.8 These projects amount to some £8,500 spent so far in 2007-08 plus a further £4,500 allocated to sign decluttering and installation of replacements for the large shield signs. Budget bids for 2008-09 (total of £19,000) reflect both the large scale of both issues and the fact that the Authority has only a share of the responsibility or ability to make a difference.

### **Recommendation 3**

#### **To note and comment on the two action plans.**

#### **6 Animal accident warning signs**

- 6.1 Signs which warn of the danger of animal accidents relate both to the programme of sign rationalisation and to the plans to reduce the number of accidents. On the one hand there is the desire to remove unnecessary and obtrusive signs; on the other there is a call for more (and more eye-catching) signs to prevent more animals from being hurt.
- 6.2 The issue has been the subject of much discussion amongst numerous stakeholders, including road safety officers, Police officers, Fire and Rescue Service officers, highways officers, commoners, Agisters and Authority staff. Crucially, the proposed design has the backing of the New Forest Road Safety Council which, amongst other activities, has run a competition with local schools to produce slogans which have hitherto been displayed on the large shield signs.
- 6.3 The Boundary Markers and Signage Advisory Group has been driving the signage decluttering strategy and requested that the design for the new sign should be approved by the Authority before it is recommended to Hampshire County Council for production and installation. Although the Highway Authority has the final say on the sign, we understand they are grateful for the consultation undertaken by Authority staff and will be happy to progress the signs as soon as possible. The Authority has 2007-08 budgeted funds for this work, providing a demonstration of our commitment to both sign rationalisation and animal accident reduction.

- 6.4 **Annex 5** gives details of the proposed design as agreed with the Road Safety Council. New Forest District Council and Hampshire Highways officers are preparing scaled drawings of the sign; changes in relative proportions and font sizes will occur, but the content and basic design will remain.
- 6.5 Approval of the design by the Authority will enable the B3054 pilot route decluttering programme to be completed and, in due course, pave the way for similar work across the National Park.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**To approve the proposed design for a new sign assembly to replace the large shield-shaped signs currently located at the start of routes with high animal accident rates.**