

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 22 FEBRUARY 2007

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Lindsay Cornish, Chief Executive

Summary

This report covers the period since the last Authority meeting on 18 January for all work except planning development control and enforcement – which covers activity in January. A very busy period in which work on revising the Corporate Plan and budget setting have been given priority. Continuing good performance with planning targets. Works starts on preparing the full bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund on the '*New Forest in Common*' partnership project, which if successful could bring up to £4m into the National Park.

Recommendation

To note the report.

Resources

Routine

Paper

NFNPA 157/07: Cover paper

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MEMBERS

2. Some members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events:
 - Resources and Performance Committee, 18 January
 - Joint Core Strategy working group meeting, 22 January
 - Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association meeting on 26 January
 - Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association Improvement Board on 26 January
 - Chairman's informal briefing session on 9 February
 - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 20 February
3. Forthcoming activities include:
 - Training of Chairmen and Deputy Chairman, following the February Authority meeting
 - Standards Committee meeting, 26 February
 - Member training on Equality and Diversity, 28 February
 - New Forest Consultative Panel meeting, 1 March
 - Joint Core Strategy working group meeting, 2 March
 - Resources and Performance Committee meeting, 13 March
 - Planning Development Control Committee meeting, 20 March
 - Joint Core Strategy working group meeting, 27 March
 - Authority meeting, 28 March
 - Timber production briefing including visit to Giddings sawmill, mid March
 - Informal Member briefing on the Corporate Plan, late March

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

First Purpose

Conservation and Enhancement

4. Corporate Plan

- **Commoning and farming; Nature conservation (C1/C3)**

Following confirmation of support from the Heritage Lottery Fund the first meeting of the *New Forest in Common* project partnership was held. The group approved the recruitment of the project development officer whose work will include developing: a plan to enable the active engagement of local communities in the project, a conservation management plan which will prioritise areas within the Forest that require restoration work, and the evidence we need to submit a high-quality, well supported full application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The post will be hosted by the Authority.

Our ecologist, Ian Barker has: provided advice, in liaison with Natural England on a range of development control, tree works applications and planning policy issues; met Hampshire County Council Environment Group to agree input into planning cases; secured permanent membership of the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) - a botanical annual survey programme of sites within the New Forest is to be agreed with the centre shortly; attended a meeting of the Solent Forum Nature Conservation Group, which is helping to coordinate and promote data collection on the marine and coastal zone, including wader roosts and marine habitats; (this winter has seen a record number of seahorse sightings in the Solent).

Stephen Trotter and Kathryn Boler (External Funding officer) had a useful meeting with the Forestry Commission to discuss potential joint projects that could be progressed through external funding, resulting in a long list of project ideas which will now be prioritised.

- **Landscape conservation (C2)**

Sarah Kelly (Landscape officer) has been giving landscape advice to various colleagues in the planning department and investigated the Landscape Character Assessment (produced in 2000 by New Forest District Council and the New Forest Committee) and the Tranquillity map (produced this year by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England), to establish whether they are appropriate for use by the Authority.

- **Sustainable development (SE1)**

Claire Gingell has been identifying the range of support that is currently available to businesses within the New Forest, identifying any gaps and

mechanisms for addressing them, in partnership with others. It is likely that initial work will be focussed on providing environmental training for accommodation providers, producers, farm and village shops linking in with the New Forest Marque, New Forest Business Partnership and the Green Leaf Scheme.

- **Archaeology (C6)**

A meeting has taken place with the County Archaeologist, David Hopkins, to discuss the way forward with access to the County Sites and Monuments Records and data exchange. The plan is to take over the archaeological advisory role for Development Control purposes from the County at the beginning of April, with participation already in assessing the archaeological needs of the gas pipeline from Lockerley.

Meetings have taken place with the National Trust to determine an approach to the archaeology of the Foxbury plantation during its clearance and return to acid heathland. An appraisal of the conservation needs and status of former Paultons Park Brick kiln, potentially affected by the proposed Roundabout at the Whinwistle Junction on the A36 has been commissioned. Acquisition of historic mapping is proceeding and archaeological and historical data sources covering the National Park are being examined.

Research objectives and funding on maritime and inter-tidal archaeology are being explored with English Heritage alongside an approach to the Heritage Lottery Fund Heritage Grants Programme. Frank Green has met the New Forest Section of the Hampshire Field Club to discuss their current activities, how the Authority can support and work closely with them and what further survey needs there might be for the inclosures on Crown lands.

- **Commoning and farming; sustainable development (C1 and SE1)**

Emma Rigglesworth has been working with New Forest Produce Ltd, the local abattoir and meat producers using the New Forest Marque to help improve traceability of NF Marque beef and encourage producers to improve sourcing of local livestock. A meeting was held on 23 January which was attended by over 20 meat producers. A follow up meeting with local butchers and livestock producers (currently not using the Marque) will be held in February.

The Commoning Review Steering Group held a successful open afternoon at the New Forest Museum on 25 January. Approximately 30 commoners attended and gave their views on a diverse range of issues. An encouraging number of young commoners attended and there are plans to set up a young commoners group.

5. Other activities

Include: a review of the Directorate's local performance indicators; developing the next year's Business Plan and amendments for the revised Corporate Plan for 2007-08/2008-09.

Stephen Trotter has become a member of the Forestry Commission's South East Regional Advisory Committee.

Second Purpose

Understanding and Enjoyment

6. Partnership working

- Working with the RSPB and the Forestry Commission, staff are helping to set up the 'Aren't Birds Brilliant in the New Forest' project. There will be a camera at a goshawk nest, sending images to a TV screen at the Commission's Reptile Centre near Lyndhurst. Among other things we are helping to design the displays, script the DVD about ground-nesting birds and select a project officer.
- The Education Officer delivered a talk to Duke of Edinburgh Award Expedition Assessors introducing the role of the Authority and looking at ways that we can work together to deliver key messages.
- A meeting of the PROGRESS Project partners was attended by several staff, to consider proposed trial actions to improve access provision and reduce disturbance to habitats suitable for breeding waders. Information was provided by the RSPB on the decline in wader populations, and by the Forestry Commission on its research into the use of tracks by the public.
- Two officers also supported the Forestry Commission's PROGRESS team at a meeting to plan a Community Workshop in Boldre to be held in April.
- Staff hosted a Litter Awareness Meeting at which plans for the 2007 'Spring Clean Event' were developed and agreed.

7. Corporate Plan

- **Recreation and Visitor Management (U1):** A facilitated workshop was held to inform members of the local and national context for preparing the Recreation Management Strategy.
- **Traffic and Transport (U2):** Staff took part in the Hampshire County Council 'New Forest Transport Seminar' held at Beaulieu Motor Museum. The County Council updated delegates on its investigations into the Ampress Rail Bridge and air quality issues in Lyndhurst, Lyndhurst Parish Council presented 'The Case for a Bypass for Lyndhurst' and Natural England described 'The Environmental Context for Major Transport Schemes'.

- **Understanding and awareness (U3):** Working in conjunction with the Communication team, consultants have been appointed to take forward the process of designing distinctive boundary markers sensitive to the environment of the National Park.
- Staff met the New Forest District Council's Tourism team to discuss opportunities for closer working, including having a National Park presence in Tourist Information Centres and exploring the potential for seeking accreditation under the European 'Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas'.
- **Education (U4):** The initial meeting of the New Forest National Park Educator's Forum was held, bringing together representatives of 13 outdoor education organisations. The Forum evolved from an identified need to encourage co-operation, partnership, information sharing and good practice amongst education providers within and adjacent to the National Park.
- **Countryside Management (U5):** Discussions have been held with staff from the Forestry Commission, the National Trust and others in relation to planning an event for front-line staff, to give those working on the ground in the New Forest a chance to get together and to learn about the role of the Authority.
- **Enhancing access opportunities (U6):** The Transport and Tourism Officer gave a short presentation to a meeting of the Bournemouth Cycle Forum which sought to progress ideas for a safe and attractive cycle route from Bournemouth to the New Forest National Park.

8. Other activities

- Tenders have been invited, and received, for the design and creation of an interactive Fun Zone as part of the Learning About section of the Authority web-site.
- The Education Officer led an evening session for students from Townhill School, Southampton, on sustainability issues and wrote to 60 junior and primary schools within and adjacent to the National Park inviting them to contribute to the Special Qualities consultation.

Planning Policy

9. Corporate Plan

Partnership working (A3):

- Cross organisational meetings took place to link the review of the National Park Management Plan, the New Forest District Community Strategy and the Local Development Framework Core Strategy.

▪ **Spatial planning policies (A4):**

- The National Park Authority participated in the recent Examination in Public sessions for the South East Plan. Topics debated in January included the New Forest National Park policy, the proposals for growth in South Hampshire (including green infrastructure provision) and the proposals for Central Hampshire and the New Forest. (SEERA has circulated a revised proposal on green infrastructure as a result).
- The Examination in Public for the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Core Strategy opened on 23 January. The issues surrounding the principle of extending the submitted Core Strategy into the Wiltshire area of the National Park will be considered at the end of February.
- The Authority has formally submitted the Local Development Scheme (LDS) to the Secretary of State for consideration. This document sets out the proposed timetable for the production of documents that make up the Local Development Framework.
- The binding Inspector's Report into the Authority's Statement of Community Involvement has now been received. Subject to the implementation of the recommendations set out in the Report, the National Park Authority's Statement of Community Involvement is considered to be sound.
- The final list of matters and participants to be involved in the Examination in Public of the South West Regional Spatial Strategy has been published. The National Park Authority has been invited to attend two sessions, covering the Appropriate Assessment of the Plan and the proposals for development in the Bournemouth – Poole – Christchurch sub-region.

Development Control

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

Planning applications: received 109. Applications continue to be registered within two to three working days following receipt. The Authority remains on course to receive the projected 1,400 planning applications per year.

Planning decisions: 84 issued, of which 65 were approved (77%) and 19 were refused (22%). Three applications were withdrawn. Six (7%) of these decisions were made by the Planning Committee at the meeting held on 16 January.

88% of householder applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 80%); and 63% of minor applications were determined within eight weeks (the target is 65%).

Live planning applications: 289 at 31 January, compared with 267 at 31 December.

Appeals: Nine new appeals received this month. Of the 8 appeal decisions in January, five were dismissed, three allowed and one withdrawn.

Planning Appeals

	Against decisions taken by predecessor LPAs	Against decisions taken by NFNPA	Total
Appeals Received	9	66	75
Appeals Determined	70	12	82
Appeals Allowed	25	4	29
Appeals Dismissed	45	8	53
% of appeals allowed	36%	33%	35%
Number of outstanding appeals	5	51	56

Enforcement: 66 new enforcement cases were registered in January and 20 cases were closed. There are currently some 290 outstanding enforcement cases.

In January, the following enforcement documents were sent to the parish and town councils (and copied to members and the local ward councillors):

- (a) A **quarterly enforcement bulletin** which summarises the level of enforcement activity undertaken within the National Park for the period October – December.
- (b) The **parish enforcement list** which sets out the progress of current 'live' enforcement cases in each parish. The information provided includes the site address, the alleged breach of planning control, the stage that the case has reached and the officer dealing with the case. This list will be updated and sent out at the start of each month.
- (c) A **schedule of all outstanding enforcement notices** which provides an update on those cases where an enforcement notice has been served but has not yet been complied with. This will also be sent out at the start of each month.

Naked Eye (consultants) have now completed their analysis and reported their findings for improvement within the development control administrative functions to the Authority Management Board with recommendations. Naked Eye have been retained to assist management and staff in efficiently implementing the agreed actions within the next two months.

11. Environmental Design

- A normal reactive service continues to be provided in respect of general enquiries and planning, listed building consent and tree work applications, providing advice on trees and listed buildings and building design.
- The team was consulted by Development Control on 19 applications during January. 10 consultations were returned within the 14 day target, the rest are still live. **(Corporate Plan Objective A5, C7)**
- 26 tree work applications were received during January and 12 determined. The target for determining applications is 80% within 8 weeks of registration. During January, 85% were determined within the 8 week target date. 15% were outside the target date due to protracted discussions over a Felling Licence Application and a Hedgerow Removal Notice which was later withdrawn in agreement with the applicant.
- Five new Tree Preservation Orders were made in January. There is no set target for making new Tree Preservation Orders. They are made in the interests of amenity and expediency as required.
- The preparation of tree advice leaflets is in progress.
- Work is continuing on design guidance for new agricultural buildings. **(Corporate Plan Objective C7)**
- Work is continuing on a framework for a Conservation Area Management Plan which will cover all conservation areas in the Park, alongside work looking at the extent of existing conservation areas. **(Corporate Plan Objective C7)**
- Work is continuing on text and illustrative material for the Park's website. **(Corporate Plan Objective A1)** Design pages have gone live. Building conservation and tree pages are expected to go live during February.

CORPORATE FUNCTIONS

Communications

12. Corporate Plan

- Design work started on the National Park's corporate identity guide for publication in the spring. **(A1, U3)**
- Design work started on the 2007 edition of the *Pocket Guide* for publication in March **(A1, U3, U4)**
- Work with a freelance national journalist over recent weeks resulted in an informative feature about commoning in *The Telegraph* on Saturday 3 February. **(A1, U3)**

- The first meeting was held to start planning for this year's New Forest Show stand. **(U3)**
- Countrywide Films/Riff Raff Media based near Cadman was appointed to make the short introductory film about the National Park for use in presentations, talks and on the website. Work started on drafting the script. **(U3, U4)**
- The website was improved with significant amounts of new material being added in areas such as 'planning', 'visiting' and 'news'. **(A1, U3)**
- Initial discussions were held with Brockenhurst College about the possibility of photography students contributing to the National Park's Photographic Library. **(A1)**

13. Partnership working

- Detailed planning and work was carried out for the joint litter awareness initiative with the Forestry Commission and New Forest District Council due in March. **(C2)**
- Working with the Understanding and Enjoyment Directorate, final touches were put to the 2007 *Forest Focus* visitor newspaper in conjunction with the Forestry Commission and plans for distribution agreed. **(U3)**
- Copy was written for the next edition of the *New Forest Today* magazine which is produced jointly with New Forest District Council, the Forestry Commission, the Primary Care Trust and others. **(U3)**

14. 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)**

Member Services

15. Member Services have been involved in facilitating preparations for Authority and committee meetings, providing committee and member support and following up on actions arising from the meetings.
16. Other work undertaken by the Section during the period included:
 - assisting in reviewing draft policies on access to information and the draft publication scheme for approval by the Authority and receiving further training on access to information provisions;
 - monitoring complaints received by the Authority and working towards setting up an electronic complaints logging and processing system and assisting in tailoring it to suit the Authority's needs.
17. Member Services also finalised arrangements for producing the yearbook, sent out a members' satisfaction survey, and organised various member events including Clive Chatters' informal briefing

session and skills training for Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of the Authority and its committees.

Corporate Services

18. Business Support

- The Agresso procurement / finance system has been rolled out to all departments. Following a post go live review of the systems and processes, arrangements are in hand to complete the identified actions to maximise the benefit of the system.
- Working groups have been looking at improvements in our administration systems and procedures. The work of these groups is helping to define requirements for the Authority's electronic document and records management system which will ease access to information and facilitate improved communication for staff and members of the Authority.
- The first staff health and safety forum took place on 30 January. The representatives contributed to drafts of the Authority's health and safety policy documents. The group also discussed the future make up of the forum, risk assessments and staff awareness / training (including fire / evacuations).

19. Human Resources

- Diversity awareness training for members and staff of the Authority has commenced. Meetings are being scheduled with external stakeholder groups in February / March and working in partnership with these interested external organisations the Authority will undertake impact assessments with the Disability Champions identified in each Directorate.
- As of 31 January 2007 the Authority has 65 permanent paid staff members (60.23 full time equivalents). We are currently seeking to recruit a Project Development Officer one-year, Heritage Lottery funded post, see paragraph 4).

20. ICT

- Members Services are trialling the implementation the Authority's 'Idox' complaints system during the next few weeks. This will allow tracking and auditing of responses and make easier the highlighting of any recurring issues.
- Working with the Environmental Design team, the Trees and Tree Work Applications web modules are now installed onto the Authority's web server. The module and associated texts are being reviewed prior to sign off, following which this new addition to our web site will be made available to the public.

- An external consultant has been assisting with further development of the 'Acolaid' reports and documents. This work has specifically improved the clarity of presentation on standardised letters. These changes will not only assist the Authority's customers directly but will also reduce the number of mis-directed calls to the planning team and the associated frustration and delays experienced by customers.
- Communications and ICT are continuing to work together in developing the Authority's home page both in its content and presentation. This work includes developing ways to increase the visual impact of the site such as including changing seasonal pictures randomly selected from a range of seasonal pictures provided by the Communications team.

21. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE

- The 2007/2008 budget setting process is well underway. The first round of bids from Directors has been collated and individual challenge meetings with budget officers to review their bids have been completed. Budget proposals will be presented to Resources and Performance Committee on 13 March and to the Authority on 28 March.
- Smith & Williamson, the consultancy carrying out the funding study for the Authority, has agreed to delay their report till mid February to enable them to consider the preliminary budget bids for 2007 /08 as part of their analysis of the Authority's potential funding pressures.
- Janet Purnell, who facilitated and coordinated the production of last year's Corporate Plan, has been engaged to help in the roll-forward of the Plan to next year. Consultation to support the planning process is under way.

Recommendation

To note the report.